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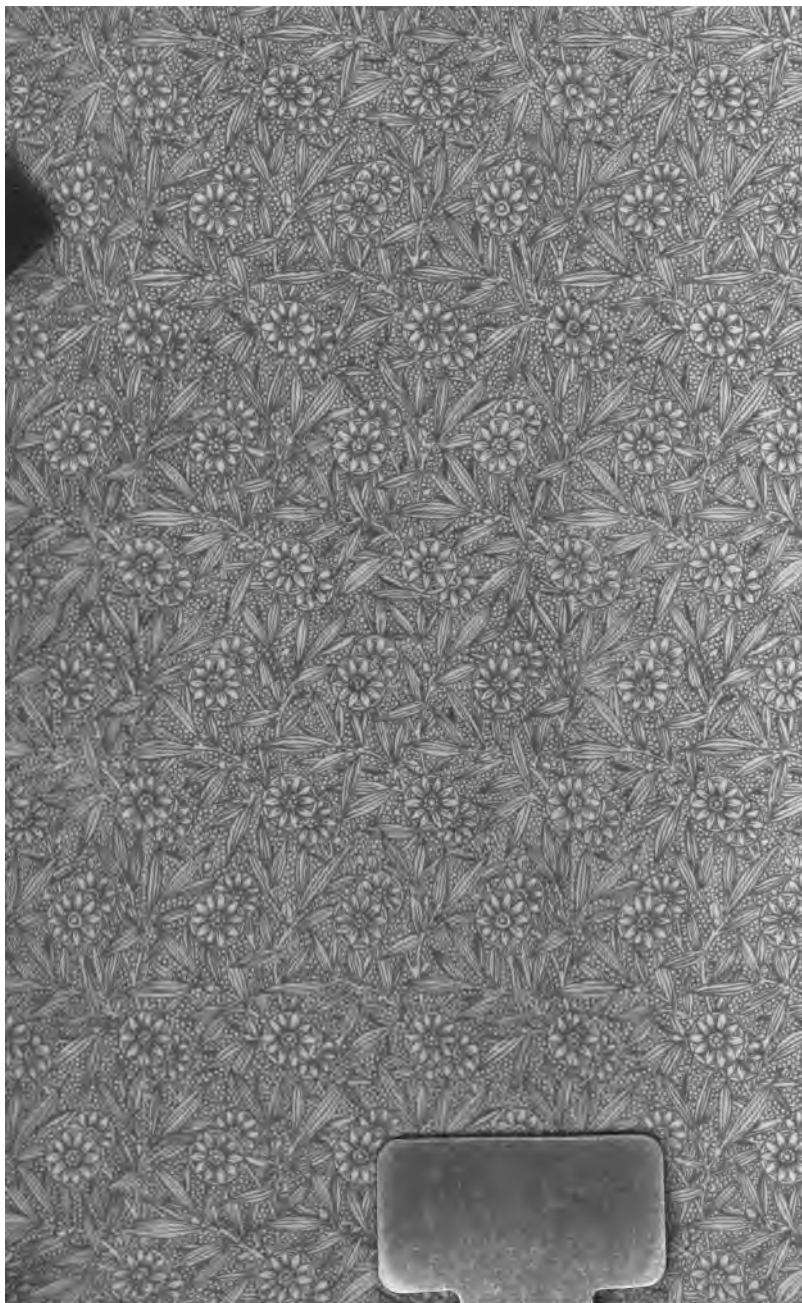
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FIGHTING WITH FATE.



# FIGHTING WITH FATE.

A NOVEL.

Translated from the German

OF

E. MARLITT.



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# FIGHTING WITH FATE.

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## CHAPTER I.

A YEAR had already passed away since the death of the old Frau Oberforstmeisterin.\* A year seems a long time in speaking of the dead, whom we all know are soon forgotten, and the old lady at the Hirschwinkel had left no "friends"† behind her, as they say in those parts—neither had any human being, far or near, bought or worn even a scrap of black ribbon on her account, so that her solitary existence would simply have died out, like an extinguished flame, had she not all her life long borne the indelible stamp of originality,—a characteristic which prevents such rapid oblivion on the part of the survivors.

\* High Ranger. Women always take their husband's title, or calling, in German.

† Relations.

And so it fell out, that the few villagers whose road led them, now and then, past the house in The Hirschwinkel, never failed to look up at the bow-window, fully expecting that the first sound of their footsteps would bring that well-known head, with its wealth of snow white curls and the steel spectacles on the nose, over to the window. No rent in the sleeve; however carefully concealed, no dirty spot on petticoat or apron had ever escaped that keen glance from under the glasses; but none the less quick had it been in discerning the faintest trace of patient suffering; each always received an appropriate word; one, a severe reproof, the other, a kindly invitation to bring their woe-worn faces in, without delay. But it was the workmen in the forest, the wood-cutters, the pitch-boilers, the rosin-burners, who really felt her loss. The "Woodsprite's" brisk footsteps had always been heard as regular as clock work. The black crape hood, the large black lace shawl she wore wrapped round her shoulders had grown no less familiar to them than the nimble little feet in white stockings, over which were crossed in old-fashioned style,

black ribbon sandals, and the green satin bag dangling about on her arm, while by his aged mistress's side trotted her sagacious white poodle.

An abundance of green herbs, which the aged lady was never weary hunting after, was always to be found in this same bag, and the capacious ante-diluvian reticule contained, moreover, a complete assortment of surgical instruments, plaster-cases and medicine bottles, amongst which too, pieces of common soap were never lacking, for the Frau Oberforstmeisterin was in the habit of boiling down *soap* in a copper, after the manner in which more common-place individuals benevolently prepare warm soup for the poor. The terror of all dirty people, she was indefatigable in doctoring and bathing the sick, or those who met with accidents, but any symptoms of indulging in the superstitions prevalent in Thuringia, such as doing penance or using magic for wounds or illness of any kind, would transform her at once into a regular scold and spitfire. Then she would give it to the people soundly.

She had died from natural causes in conse-

quence of a feverish cold, caught in gathering herbs on the top of a windy hill ; as her mind wandered incessantly from the first moment of her illness to the last, and she had never regained consciousness, it was but too apparent that the evil spirits she had been at war with all her life, had got the better of her at the last. She must, indubitably, have seen "something" in the forest. She had been bewitched.

No will was forthcoming, consequently her admirably managed property, known as The Hirschwinkel, went to a relative of whom no one had ever heard ; they barely learned that his name was Markus, and that he was the owner of an important manufactory near Berlin.

He did not appear to attach much importance to this new acquisition. Possibly the superintendence of it did not suit him, for it was all let out on lease. The tenant-farmer lived on the ground-floor while the mice ran riot in the upper part of the deserted mansion, and the spiders plugged up the key holes with "their nasty, dirty webs," as Frau Griebel, the farmer's better half, was constantly de-

clearing ; for neither she herself nor yet the blessed broom and scrubbing brush, had ever been allowed to enter there.

The higher levels of the Thuringian forest are not particularly favourable to the growth of cereals ; pasture land and potato crops gain the preference. The narrow valleys often extend for miles in one long green line of velvet sward, embedded between the wooded heights ; meadows, purling brooks, and now and then a cool trout stream, alternate with the smooth white line of road. The Hirschwinkel formed a singular exception to this rule ; it was an exceptionally sunny sheltered nook in the forest ; a species of island, where the summer breeze could play over the fields of waving corn, and even revel in the depths of the rich golden grain.

This pretty spot lay somewhat apart from the more frequented thoroughfares, behind the scenes as it were ; and so it could easily enough come to pass that a stranger, after walking the high road for an hour or more, might come to a sudden stand-still, and pause to refresh himself at some wayside spring by way of preparation for another long stretch.

The narrow stream which flowed down a declivity between the roots of an overhanging pine tree was cold as ice, and delicious to the taste; the little silver travelling flask was filled again and again, then its owner proceeded on his way. He wore a plaid flung across his shoulders, and a leathern bag hung at his side—light travelling gear without which the slim individual in the pale grey paletot might have passed for a mere pedestrian, as he wended his way at a swinging pace, evidently carried away by the woodland charm of the pathway which seemed to force an entrance through the dense mass of foliage.

Hitherto he had been a solitary traveller, not a human being had he come across. He watched the squirrels skipping from bough to bough, and the feathery fronds of the ferns quivering by the roadside, when disturbed by the little animals that frequent the maze of vegetation, which the reproductive power of the wood soil keeps always throwing out afresh.

The light breeze wafted the fragrance of the strawberries towards him, and now and then the appetising smell of fried potatoes; it bore too the faint sounds of a hatchet, and for the

last quarter of an hour the wayfarer had heard the murmur of running water on his right, which, however, he was unable to see. Gradually the thicket grew less dense, and sunny patches of meadow land became visible here and there; a rapid stream ran through the grassy slope, and further on turned the wheel of a mill. All the charm of a forest idyll lay before him framed in the setting of the dark wood. A narrow bridge spanned the stream, a primitive sort of affair, between the yawning planks of which the rushing water below was visible.

The stranger quickened his pace, and stepped at once upon the bridge, probably with a view to getting a still better sight of the lovely landscape before him, but alas! he knew nothing about the treachery of these wooden bridges, for as he was gazing spell-bound at the mill his foot suddenly got wedged in between the pine stem forming the outer edge and the next plank.

A malediction on his lips, he struggled, with every symptom of angry impatience, to draw his foot out of the trap it was caught in, but the bridge had no railing, and the prisoner



had not even a stick on which to lean, and thus be able to release himself. He paused, quivering with rage and excitement, and looked around for help, which in that solitary valley seemed more than doubtful. Just at that moment a female form appeared at the corner of the mill making straight for the bridge. She was carrying a bundle of grass on her head which she supported with upraised arm. She was to all appearance a servant maid, a timid young country girl, frightened at the sight of a stranger, for her pace so rapid at first, had visibly slackened on seeing him.

“Look here, child,” he cried out impatiently, “make a little haste,” but these words seemed to have the effect of petrifying her.

He muttered something about rustic stupidity, and made another frantic effort to free himself. His exertions, however, had the effect of convincing the girl there was nothing to fear, but on the contrary every need to assist. She no longer hesitated, but went over to him.

“Oh, I see you have discovered that I’m not a man-eater,” he said, without vouchsafing another glance at her. “Look here, you

must help me out of the stocks ; stand there close to me, but steadily, so that I can lean on your shoulder."

She went up to him without a word, but just as he was going to make a prop of her, he noticed her take a handful of grass surreptitiously from the bundle on her head, and slip it between his hand and her shoulder. . . . How absurd ! This peasant maiden must be a regular prude. He paused, and drew away his arm. "Would you rather not," he enquired, with some amusement.

"Well, I'd certainly rather not, but the miller and his man won't be home before evening, and his wife is weak and ill."

"I see, then, in fact, unless you take pity on me, I may starve here like the fox in the trap."

He bent forward, intending to take a peep under the large white handkerchief she had tied under her chin to shelter her from the scorching sun, but it stood far out in front like a huge hat, shading the upper part of her face so as to form an incognito ; the lower part was even more completely shrouded in the folds of her linen tie—pretty or plain remained uncertain.

“So then, little prude, there’s nothing else for it, you must needs condescend. Imagine yourself for the time being a Sister of Mercy, or do it out of pure christian charity.”

She did not speak, but rested her arm on her hip so as to give her position greater security. She was a tall, slight, beautifully made girl, and stood like a rock, while he, leaning on her shoulder, struggled by a few violent jerks to get his foot free. A creaking, a smothered curse, this was all she heard, and in another moment he had sprung into the middle of the bridge, liberated, and stamping away as though to make sure the maltreated limb had escaped uninjured.

Meantime the girl was proceeding on her way.

“Stay,” he shouted after her, “just one word.” “Haven’t time, the fish will be spoilt,” she replied, without pausing to listen, and half turning she pointed to the net hanging on her arm with a trout in it.

“Couldn’t it be replaced in that case?” he enquired.

“No.”

“No? but what about my thanks then?”

“Keep them to yourself.”

“Oh, how pert we are,” he said laughing, as he put up the silk handkerchief with which he had been brushing off the remains of the pine wood from his unlucky foot. In another moment he was beside her.

“It seems to me,” he said, “that that kerchief conceals a deucedly wilful little head. But how, if I choose to be as obstinate as yourself, and absolutely refuse to accept your assistance gratis?”

“Then you’ll have to go back to your place on the bridge.”

He laughed out loud, and made another eager attempt to pierce through her disguise. The girl had plenty of wit, no doubt about that, and very likely her face showed just as little of the rustic stupidity as her tongue. She turned away her head quickly, so he had no resource but to survey her figure. She was poorly clad. The arms had been taken out of her faded dress, and were replaced by those of her bodice which fell long and snowy white below the elbow. Over her neck and shoulders she wore a coarse, washed-out, woollen kerchief fastened behind, and the stiff plates of her

highly starched blue apron sat in disfiguring folds round her waist and hips. The skirt, though worn and degraded to the rank of a working petticoat, was evidently town made, and had originally, no doubt, formed part of her mistress's wardrobe.

“Well, allow me at all events to shake you by the hand for acting the good Samaritan,” and he took off his glove, thereby showing a firm white hand with a signet ring on it, which he held towards her.

“My hand is hard,” she replied, drawing back, and burying the arm on which she was carrying the net in the folds of her apron.

“Ah, I might have known that,” he said slyly. “The Thuringian thistles sting at the slightest touch; I noticed that before on the bridge; are you in service at the mill yonder?”

For a moment she made no reply, then said curtly, “the miller cannot afford to keep a servant, he only rents the mill; it is part of the Hirschwinkel property”. With these words she marched off straight as an arrow, holding the bundle of grass upon her head, and looking neither to right nor left. She showed very unmistakeably that she did not

intend to submit to any further cross-examination.

This kind of countrified reserve seemed to afford him intense amusement. He was quite a young man, and his step was not one whit less elastic than her own.

"Then the mill belongs to the estate?" he repeated interrogatively. "Aha, then I know now where you live. This road leads straight to the Manor House in the Hirschwinkel, does it not?"

"And to the Farm also."

He stopped abruptly. "Oh, the small farm belonging to the Manor, which that beggarly Amtmann \* persists in holding on illegally."

At this remark the head carrying the grass bundle was suddenly turned towards him, the lower part of the face was thus disclosed to view, and the stranger caught a momentary glimpse of a beautiful little mouth with coral lips which were quivering with anger.

"I live at the Amtmann's," she said, cutting the conversation short. This poor thing in the yoke of servitude looked absolutely formidable.

\* Judge.

“I’m afraid I have offended you,” he said. “You think a great deal of your master then?”

She preserved an obstinate silence. “Why, you seem to be a being quite apart,” he said, with a suppressed smile. “But in the Amtmann’s service, there’s something in that, do you know it puts you completely in my power?”

The girl involuntarily drew back.

“Yes, I am quite serious. I could take away that bundle of grass on the spot, and lay claim to that handkerchief too, unless you can prove your master’s right and title to the meadow it was mown on. He never pays his rent, but goes on drawing all the good out of the land he was given notice to quit a year ago. What have you to say to that?”

For some time she seemed unable to speak. Then she said in a low tone “that you must be the new master at the Hirschwinkel”.

“Just so. Do you see now that it would be your best policy to behave civilly to me?”

“I—to you?” and a thrill of indignation seemed to run through her frame.

“Don’t be so angry,” he said, with a laugh. “I’m not so bad I can assure you—quite the

contrary. In fact, nothing would induce me now to accept the horny hand so basely refused me a little while ago with the 'touch me not' air; no, not if you went down on your knees to me, but I could wish to see you behave rather more civilly."

"To the enemy of one dear to me?"

"Enemy? Well, yes, I suppose you are right, inasmuch as I am the sworn foe of all notorious gamblers and drunkards, and your Amtmann is said to be one without his equal."

The girl sighed, and stammered out nervously, "Then I suppose you will make ——".

"Make short work with your good master, you were going to say," he broke in in a severe tone, and without moving a muscle of his face. "Certainly, I'll turn out at once, without mercy, the spendthrift, the squanderer, you may rely upon it; I stand no nonsense in business matters. Now, do you know who you have got to deal with?"

"Oh, yes, a rich man like the one in the Bible."

"Exactly. A man who, because of his riches, has not a chance of the kingdom of heaven, poor wretch! Aye, aye, you are



quite right, a tyrant, a vampire, a man who in money matters has a heart of stone, or more properly speaking no heart at all, as befits a man of business—but don't walk so fast, girl."

And she was indeed walking like the wind. This time Herr Markus did not attempt to follow her, but stood watching her intently as she moved along. True it was, the ugly clumsy dress disfigured her, but for all that she was just like a Thuringian pine, full of life and unconscious grace in every turn of her lithe young form. What a pity that scorching suns, and the wear and tear of poverty and toil must soon destroy those graceful outlines, rendering her hard and angular before her time. There was still a question, however, if the head disencumbered of its shroud might not at once dispel the illusion of nobility and grace produced by that fair form. The sweet mouth was no guarantee that she did not squint, rejoice in coarse features, freckles or red hair—but no, beneath the hem of that handkerchief a rich dark tress had fallen loose—red haired she was not.

## CHAPTER II.

THE girl had scarcely proceeded twenty paces, when a stout little woman in a brown straw hat and loose jacket emerged from a side path leading direct to the farm. She marched straight up to the girl, and held her fast by the apron. "See here, lass," she demanded, "do you really mean to tell me that you've got such lots of those dear potatoes, that at the end of June you can afford to stop those young beggar's dirty mouths with them?" It did not sound exactly like a scolding; the woman spoke slowly and deliberately, but at the same time impressively—you could easily gather that she was accustomed to keeping people in order, even in her most unguarded moments. "There am I, crawling about the cellars every day on all fours, hoping to find a few potatoes still remaining for our own table, and up yonder," she pointed with her finger back to the spot she was returning from, "they are roasting them in heaps in the ashes.

If that isn't enough to vex a saint! We pay a high rent for our poor ground, and are never a day behindhand with it, while your Amtmann has all the good fields to himself. You go on living at that reckless rate, never remembering that the day of reckoning must ——."

"Let me go, woman," said the girl in a tone half commanding half entreating, as she struggled to get free.

"Woman indeed," repeated the stout little person angrily, without attempting to let go her hold. "Am I a day labourer's wife, and have you no manners, girl? If you had said Frau Stewardess or even Frau Griebel, but plain 'woman'. You're not a bit better than the people you're living with. You give away things that are still unpaid for, without a thought, and a stuck-up proud minx into the bargain. Who ever saw you either mowing or hay making without those winkers on?" and she pointed to the white handkerchief on the girl's head. "People don't carry home fodder on their heads in this part of the world, it's not the custom here. But let us see," she said, bending forward a little, "what have we here? Trout, as I live—only fancy, trout!

Aye, aye, let them alone for knowing what's good at the farm."

"The fish is for the invalid."

"Oh, ah, indeed. The fish is for the invalid, but that old glutton of an Amtmann will eat it all the same. Look here, lass, if I didn't know that so well, do you think I wouldn't sometimes send over a partridge or a little tit-bit of that kind. I'm not such a savage, but I can feel ——."

"We thank you," was the short curt reply from beneath the white handkerchief.

"We thank you," repeated the little roly-poly mockingly. "Pretentious goose; may I ask who do you mean by 'we'? It's true indeed that Amtmanns have made ducks and drakes of their fine fortune, the very clothes on their backs hardly belong to them now, but for all that they're still gentlefolk, and not to be evened to the like of you."

Meantime Herr Markus had long since reached the scene of action, and was standing unperceived beside the speaker. He had difficulty in suppressing a laugh. This comical little woman in the mocking repetition of "we thank you," had made a low and solemn

tion?" enquired Herr Markus, pointing to a solitary group of trees, behind which the girl was just disappearing. Once again at the turning of the road her figure had been thrown out in sharp relief against the background; singular incongruity! The appearance was far more like that of a slim brown Fellah daughter of the Nile, than that of a robust Thuringian maiden.

"What silly questions you do ask to be sure," laughed Frau Griebel. "You're standing in the very centre of the Hirschwinkel at this blessed moment, and have been walking for the last half hour on your own property. You can get a peep at the back-buildings already, between the trees yonder. You spoke of coffee a few minutes ago, Herr Markus; well, you shall drink such coffee at the Griebels as hasn't its equal. Just you go on sauntering along this nice dry road, follow your nose, and you can't make a mistake. Meantime, I'll just slip round at the back, and get into the kitchen through the yard—must see if the servant has the water boiling."

The style in which this portly little dame made her way through the crashing bushes

could hardly be called "slipping," but she got on very rapidly all the same, and was soon lost to view.

The Manor House was a building totally devoid of all decoration; an old house with a high roof, and well preserved by tiles at the gable end. One monotonous mass of white, there was nothing to break the barrack-like façade except the bow window, which was so overgrown with ivy above and below, that the window with its three sides presented the aspect of port-holes. On the ground floor the somewhat isolated dwelling was protected by safety shutters, while in the upper storey there was nothing but curtains, visible through the dusty panes, all of white calico trimmed with coarse, crotchet lace.

To the right, in the high wall that flanked the house on either side, and shut it entirely off from the farm premises, was the entrance, a handsome massive double door, with brass handles; to the left, the wall ran along in one unbroken line as far as the corner, where a rustic pavilion, embosomed in green, rose like a little round nest, on the top. Apple and cherry trees spread their branches over the

wall, and above them again towered the lime and the chestnut tree.

The Frau Oberforstmeisterin's former home made a singularly sweet and pleasant impression. Just under the windows the smooth green sward was as fine and as luxuriant as if mown every day, and further on, in the dip of the valley, lay field upon field of waving corn, rape and beet-root, and rich tracts of flax with its pale blue shimmer.

Herr Markus had strolled on leisurely as soon as Frau Griebel had disappeared, and was now standing gazing at "the favoured spot of earth the good Lord had bestowed on him". The exquisite repose of the wood shed its sweet influence round him. At that moment how far, how very far, the deafening roar and ceaseless clatter of his own machinery, the restless noise and turmoil of the Berlin streets, all so familiar to him, what a world seemed to lie just then between-him and them.

A pair of turkeys were strutting quietly about before the door, which had probably just been thrown open in all haste to receive him, and a cloud of smoke suddenly burst from one of the

chimneys, and rose into the clear blue sky. Frau Griebel was no doubt poking away under the coffee-pot, and heating, baking and roasting ovens in honour of the new master.

“Gentle peace—delightful harmony!” murmured Herr Markus to himself. “A lullaby kind of life.” Good heavens, what was that? He started round and gazed at the windows on the ground floor, whence the sound of a piano was proceeding, then he gave himself a shake and laughed. “Oh, thou tyrant, thou odious jingle; must the weary ear be pursued even to this calm retreat by thine infernal thumping,” he exclaimed with comical pathos, as he hurried across the yard. A furious barking greeted him.

“Sultan, you rascal, quiet directly. One can’t hear the sound of their own voice,” called out Frau Griebel from the top of the steps. “Lie down, sir, or I’ll bring the stick to you.”

Sultan crept back into his kennel, while Frau Griebel, in an altered tone, advanced to meet Herr Markus with the words, “God bless your entrance here,” as she stretched out both her hands to greet the new master.

“And this is Herr Peter Griebel, my good



man," she added, slipping her arm into that of the person who had accompanied her. "And I suppose you've heard, Herr Markus, that's my Louisa playing so beautifully. She's playing the march from the Prophète in honour of you. She's the best scholar in the school, and is intended for a governess. There—now you know the ins and outs of everything."

### CHAPTER III.

THE new master declined to have his coffee served downstairs in the "best room," where "my Louisa" was still pounding away on the unfortunate piano. Despite Frau Griebel's remonstrances and hints about dust, mice and cobwebs, he insisted on installing himself in his own domicile without further delay, and accordingly proceeded to mount the stairs. He had given orders that the seals on the late owner's dwelling should not be broken until his arrival; accordingly he tore off the paper on the hall door, and Herr Peter Griebel unlocked it. The interior of the house up stairs corresponded exactly in comfort and homeliness with the expectations formed by the outside.

Frau Griebel drew up the blinds carefully. She exulted over the panes thick with dust and the surface of the table near her, on which, with a sardonic grin and clumsy finger, she traced a few hieroglyphics. But the boards

were spotless, white as snow; and a fragrant scent of clover and different kinds of sweet herbs filled the rooms, into which a stream of fresh air kept pouring through ventilators in the ceiling.

“Open windows and a moderate use of the broom will soon set all to rights,” said the new master gaily, as he opened a partition in the centre bow-window.

“So you see it was all nonsense, Zettchen, about the keyholes being stopped up,” said Herr Peter Griebel with a grin. “Where are the spiders you’ve been worrying about all this winter? Our old mistress was a proper clean woman, she was, and wouldn’t have tolerated such vermin, so where could they have come from, Zettchen?”

“You just take a look into the library, Peter, before you air your wisdom that way. You’ll find something to wonder about behind those books and bookshelves that nearly touch the ceiling. There, yonder, Herr Markus, is reading enough for you—books without end! And our old mistress had it all in her head. She was doctor and apothecary in one, and was a thousand times cleverer than that old

barber in Tillroda that the people nickname "Doctor". Of course he had his own personal grudge against a woman of such character, just like the parson who held forth over her very grave, saying she had always been a godless creature because she didn't believe in the devil or anything of that kind, and was a deadly foe to sanctimonious airs. Well, in heaven she is, all the same—that fellow in Tillroda can't prescribe to the Almighty who may or may not enter there."

"Aye, a thorough-going woman was the Frau Oberforstmeisterin," said Peter Griebel. "She was as much in her element at farming as any man. I was only her steward for the last two years, and yet, old fellow that I am, I learned more in those two years than in the ten, that went before, with my former master. Look around, sir," and he pointed to the fruitful land stretching far and wide, "that is all mostly her work, for it seems the Herr Oberforstmeister knew next to nothing at all about it. The few acres behind that little fir-plantation are pretty well run out, it is true; they belong to the Farm, and it is badly managed. I suppose your solicitor wrote to you about it, sir."

“Yes. Amtmann Franz has held the Farm on lease for the last four years, and in my late mistress’s books, which are patterns of correctness, there is not a single entry as to payment.”

“Our old mistress always shut her eyes to that, because the Frau Amtmann was her early friend,” interposed the little woman by way of explanation. “Amtmann’s debts have been like the sands of the sea, and everything belonging to him was seized by the creditors. Then the Frau Oberforstmeisterin took pity on them, and gave them the Farm, not exactly for nothing—she was too stern and exact in money matters for that—but still for a mere trifle, but the old swindler didn’t even pay that.”

She paused on a sudden, and began fumbling in her pocket for something. “Look here, Peter—just as I always told you,” she said, turning to her husband and squeezing a small roasted potatoe in his very face, so that the floury compound burst out with an appetising smell. “The Tillroda boys are gathering straw-berries up in the Grafenholz, while this ‘good gift’ is lying roasting in bushels in the ashes.”

“Well but, Zettchen.”

“Well but, husband,” she repeated in tones of mockery and wrath. “*Must* these loons always have the best of everything? And when I ask them where they got them, the answer is, as bold as brass, ‘not from Frau Griebel, but from Amtmann’s maid’. Herr Markus, I don’t want to interfere with other people’s rights, and, so far as I am concerned, they may stay at the farm and pay no rent to all eternity, but they have the best potatoe ground on the estate.”

“Zettchen, where’s your conscience,” interposed her husband admonishingly. “We have no cause to complain, all is doing well with us, and none of my family shall interfere or try to induce Herr Markus to make short work of these people. The Amtmann is old, his wife has been confined to her bed for the last year by illness, and if the maid does not understand housekeeping ——.”

“The maid! Aye, that’s the best of it all,” said Frau Griebel, giving her shoulders a contemptuous shrug. “You saw her yourself, Herr Markus, the girl in the worn out town-made dress. She carries her grass bundle on



“Why, dearie me, what’s the matter,” exclaimed Frau Griebel retreating, and opening her small eyes wide with amazement.

“Oh, my dear Frau Griebel, nothing, except that my nerves are weak; I suffer from an antipathy to governesses,” and an expression of drollery lighted up his interesting face like a rift in a cloud.

“That means you don’t like governesses. You hit me hard there, Herr Markus, though. My Louisa is intended for one too, not, of course like her at the farm—I’ll see to that. In the holidays she shall take her share in the work lustily. No trifling allowed there. She understands baking, preserving, and stuffing fowl to perfection, and she’s as much at home in the dairy as I am myself; then, in addition, she’s as rosy as a Stettin apple, and fresh and sweet as a nut. God keep her so. I’ll never let her go to any great city either, for they always bring back pale cheeks and affected manners, like Fräulein Franz at the farm. I never saw her but once at church in Tillroda, and that was quite enough for me. She’s just such a Maypole as her maid, affects great elegance, and has a small pale face, as well as I



could see from my pew," she interrupted herself quite suddenly and made for the door, "but here am I wasting my time like an old chatterbox, though I scarcely know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels with all I have on my hands. Peter, be off and kill some of the pigeons immediately, and search for some new laid eggs, while I strain the coffee."

With these words off she marched, followed by her Peter, and "the new master" turned away from the window and took a survey of the room.

The bow-window divided the outer wall of this large apartment exactly in two, so that it was flanked on either side by an ordinary window. This afforded a flood of light which was softened by draperies of green flowered curtains, and brought out into strong relief two portraits hanging on the wall. The flush of excitement rose to the young man's cheek, and an angry frown knit his brow as he gazed at the portrait of a handsome manly figure clad in a green hunting coat; a faded dusty oak-wreath was hung round it. Yes, doubtless, that was his very air, the haughty Lord High Ranger who had cast off his only sister,

because, forsooth, she had chosen to give her heart to one of the working classes, and in defiance of her brother's wrath and opposition actually married him—this same sister had been young Markus's mother. Yes, there was the pride personified which had persistently refused to recognise any relationship with "a locksmith, a blackamoor," albeit the young workman's premises had in the course of time developed into a manufactory of high repute. The Herr Oberforstmeister had always been ambitious: none but the daughter of an ancient house would he have chosen as his wife; true, she was poor, and the last of her name, but looking at both their portraits the young man was fain to confess that her high descent had not been her chief attraction. In the young huntsman's face lurked indications of intense passion; he had an eager ardent eye, and the youthful bride beside him with the myrtle bouquet in her breast was beautiful as an angel. In her expression lay such an indescribable charm one could hardly realise that even on such soul-speaking features as these was written "passing away," and that they were now mouldering in the dust.

These two people had scarcely ever been mentioned in Herr Markus's home. As a boy he had not even known that he had an uncle and aunt living in the Thuringian forest, and was greatly astonished when his mother received a letter one day from the Oberforstmeister's wife, announcing the sudden death of her brother, who had died of apoplexy at a hunting banquet with the prince. This announcement had given rise to a consultation of several hours between his parents, which resulted in the despatch of a very brief and formal note of "condolence" from his father to "the lady," and later on, a paper was sent by his mother to the solicitor renouncing all claim on her part to any property her brother, who had died childless, might have left. After that it seemed as if a curtain had dropped over the whole thing—it was never again mentioned. If the arrogant state official had once denied his sister and brother-in-law, the artisan too had possessed sufficient pride to ignore the relationship to the day of his death.

What had that lovely woman thought of such an unnatural affair? There was no arrogance on her face, on the contrary, something

tender and ecstatic. Probably she had loved the husband of her choice above all other things, and followed his wishes blindly. Then, when he died, she had very possibly desired to stretch out the hand of reconciliation to his cast-off sister, and sought to pave the way by writing. Well, she had met with a stern rebuff. Yet, for all that, this very sister's only son had become sole heir to the property in the Hirschwinkel. Could the deceased have omitted making a will on that account, so that her husband's property might simply revert to the only person who could legally lay claim to it?

He could scarcely withdraw his gaze from that beautiful face which smiled down upon him from out a fabulous wealth of fair silken curls, but he felt tempted too to wander through the rooms where this solitary being had passed so many years of seclusion. The doors, which opened from one room into another, stood wide open, so that he could pretty nearly take in the whole place at a glance. What a contrast this old fashioned dwelling presented to the modern luxury exhibited in the splendid villa his late father had built near the manufactory.

The bow-room was the most pretentious amongst them, with its cushioned furniture covered in green chintz to match the window curtains. Beautiful white Meissen china stood on the etagères around, and a large mirror besides several oil paintings decorated the walls. That, no doubt, had been the lady's room, and the one next to it her husband's. She had survived her husband twenty years, but his dressing-gown still hung on the peg, just as if its owner had exchanged it but yesterday for his uniform. His pipe lay prepared on the shelf, and the writing table was evidently arranged with painful exactitude in the self-same disorder that the Oberforstmeister left it when he went on the hunting party from which he was never to return. A strange sensation crept over the young man, as if he needs must hear other footsteps than his own in these homely apartments. The lonely widow had understood how to surround herself with an atmosphere of by-gone love still. Next came the bedroom. In it, close up beside the one couch, stood a child's crib covered with a quilt, and looking as if just made up after the rosy little sleeper had been

taken out of it. Herr Markus had already learned through the solicitor that an heir to the Hirschwinkel had been born, but died while quite a child. A world of yearning tenderness had evidently filled that lonely heart to its latest throb, but she was a person of a strong and healthy mind, and had not wasted her life in vain repining. The library, of which the old lady was supposed to have mastered the contents, gave evidence of this, so also did the adjoining still-room the walls of which were hung with all manner of healing plants and simples, which the departed was never weary collecting in the woods that she might make them into medicines and decoctions of all sorts and kinds.

On his way back to the bow-room, Herr Markus threw open, in passing by, a press, the upper part of which was unlocked. A neatly folded lace shawl was laid inside, and near it lay a large green satin bag out of which protruded a few withered stalks. Those were, doubtless, the last herbs gathered by the departed one in that fatal wind upon the hill which had caused her death. The dry leaves fell rustling to the ground as the young man

took up the bag and opened the clasp. Close beside the herbal was a case of surgical instruments, a smelling-bottle, and a worn notebook which described the whole contents. Herr Markus opened the little book with a reverent hand. Here and there, between the leaves, lay dried plants with notes in perfectly correct Latin written under them. Receipts and remarks bearing on the farm and the housekeeping, reflections, and the beginnings of different letters, alternated with each other between the leaves. This book had evidently been the Frau Oberforstmeisterin's companion in her solitary rambles, in which she had set down everything just as it came into her head—it was a curious specimen of a book, revealing the departed soul's intricacies, undisguised and unadorned, as, mayhap, neither look nor voice could have done in life.

The bag was reverently replaced in its former position, but Herr Markus seated himself near the window, at the old lady's writing table, book in hand, intent on looking further through it. What had been the last thoughts of this remarkable woman before she laid herself down to die? One page was covered with

small delicate characters—the next and last were white and untouched.

It ran thus :—

“ After conscientious reflection, I have, after all, decided on making a will, not as regards the property left by my late husband—you already know I have never considered myself free to dispose of that, but, on the contrary, looked upon myself merely as its caretaker till my death. But it is otherwise with The Farm. That was my husband’s first gift to me after we were engaged ; I drew my pin money from its produce during my married life, and also the alms I permitted myself to spend upon the poor ; I also invested a small sum I had saved, in a mortgage on the Tillroda Hotel. These I both can and will dispose of, with a good conscience. Possible it is that I may die before my unfortunate friend at The Farm—in that case, unless I make provision for her, she would be exposed to the direst poverty. Of course, I can have nothing to do with that spendthrift, the Aintmann, and his unconquerable love of squandering, and I cannot venture to leave The Farm to his wife either, unless I wish this last anchor to be turned into follies and extravagances also. She is too weak to withstand her husband—a leaf before the wind. What if I make the niece, Agnes Franz, the heiress ? Let me see you at the Hirschwinkel within the next few days, but not without the two necessary witnesses.”



This letter was evidently addressed to the deceased's man of business. In all probability on her last botanical ramble she might have turned in at "The Farm," and some occurrence there induced her to make a rough sketch of her intentions for her solicitor—death had prevented her carrying them out.

Herr Markus closed the book, and stowed it away carefully in his breast-pocket. Here was a singular discovery, an unexpected turn of affairs which imposed a mission on him—his face clouded with ill-concealed repugnance. The late Frau Oberforstmeisterin would have nothing to say to "that spendthrift, the Amtmann". Well, her heir felt quite as little inclination for any connection with the Amtmann's niece, this "young lady governess".

He could see her already in his mind's eye, the well-cared-for white hands which she knew so well how to show off before gentlemen; he summed up the smattering of French, the few daring attempts at pencil sketches, the "Moonlight Sonate," and the martyr face with the eyes coquettishly cast down—the only requisites he was accustomed to think of as embodied in the superficial person of a governess.

Long after his mother's death his father had married again, a daughter had been born of this marriage, a darling little thing, idolised by her "big brother". His step-mother, who was devoted to her house, fancied herself unequal to the education of her little "wildling," so the narrow family circle had been increased in consequence for the last four years by the addition of a governess; but in that short period they had been compelled to change three times, because it always ended by the young lady's efforts to become mistress in the Markus establishment, far surpassing her every other power.

A grim scorn curled his lip. That was all he needed, to let himself be married for the sake of his fine house. His eye sought the portrait on the wall involuntarily. That bewitching creature yonder had had nothing in common with that species. And so she had only looked upon herself as steward of the Hirschwinkel during her widowhood. She had cared for and improved this inheritance for the son of the despised "locksmith," with an unalterable sense of justice, even though her advances had been rejected from wounded

pride. A woman of character ; a strong mind had the slender lily possessed, which was looking at him out of the golden frame of fair curls, in bridal sweetness—his heart swelled with some strange longing—“ what, sentimental as I live,” and he roused himself with a shake from such idiotic nonsense, just as if it was an illness.

“ You didn’t hear me, I suppose, Herr Markus ?” said Frau Griebel as she entered, bearing a tray with coffee which she placed on the sofa table. “ And yet my china kept clapping even more than usual, but you went on staring there at the wall ; my faith, one would think you had fallen in love with the departed.”

He laughed and stood up. “ Over head and ears, Frau Griebel ; old or young, she might alike ——”

“ Don’t be talking nonsense, Herr Markus,” she paused in the act of dusting the table, and looking round with some difficulty, said almost angrily : “ a mite of a woman like her ; she sometimes still looked pink and white in the distance, like an apple blossom, but she was as wizened as a baked pear for all that, and the

curly head there was as white as snow, and that insignificant looking little creature came at last to command like a general”.

## CHAPTER IV.

HERR Markus had originally fixed his stay at the Hirschwinkel for three days at furthest. After the inspection of his new property which had become absolutely requisite, he had intended making a tour through the Thuringian forest on to France. Three days had now elapsed since his arrival, and it never occurred to him to set out on his intended journey; he no longer thought either of parting with this property, which had seemed so out of the way and inconvenient when he was at home. Indeed, he would not now have parted with this fair spot of earth at any price, it had grown as familiar to him as if he had been born at the homely old manor.

He made use of the bow-room and an adjoining bedroom to the right. The suite of apartments on the left, beginning with the late Oberforstmeister's study, and extending as far as the laboratory, after a careful ventilation, had been again put under lock and key,

as a species of reliquary, and were, by the master's orders, never to be made use of, to Frau Griebel's intense disgust.

He seemed to himself something like a hermit who had retired to the top of a lonely hill, hardly conscious that the surge of human life was going on just at his feet, because he no longer heard it. Just as still was it at the Manor House. Everything connected with the farming operations was carried on in the large outer yard, behind the exquisitely clean gravelled space, which the hall door steps led down to. None but the pampered turkeys were allowed to strut about there; the gaily painted pigeon-house and the thick branches of a pear tree rose tall and erect, and Sultan's kennel stood near the gate like a sentry-box. Active as Frau Griebel was at her post in housekeeping, she allowed no noise, no banging of doors amongst her people, and outside the windows it was quieter still; never, unless on some extraordinary occasion, did even a woman with a travelling pack on her shoulders, or a troop of children hunting for strawberries, pass through the road leading in front of the manor.

It was not, indeed, pleasure alone which detained Herr Markus at the place, he had business matters to settle also. A long projected line of railway which would run near the Hirschwinkel was about to be commenced and laid out. This gave rise to a great deal of correspondence. The line threatened to intersect the best piece of arable land on the estate, though in Farmer Griebel's opinion it might just as well run through the less valuable meadow in the valley. Herr Markus had already made the tour of his new demesne in its length and breadth. Go where he would, he found the same masterly management, the same evident desire to preserve the lands as a treasure. Amid this fruitful territory The Farm alone stood as an eyesore.

“As long as the Frau Oberforstmeisterin lived, the place looked passable,” said Peter Griebel. “The Amtmann had a right respect for our old mistress, and often followed the plough himself because of it. He had a man then too, but he left just after the girl, and old age has overtaken the Amtmann himself—he can only walk with the help of a stick. But for the keeper yonder in the Grafenholz,

there couldn't be any work done in the fields now. He comes from the place where the Amtmann used to rent the Prince's park; he was a day labourer there as a boy, and seems attached to his former employers, for he spends the little time he can spare from his hard work on the Farm lands, and—let my wife say what she will—the new maid helps him bravely.”

Herr Markus had not yet been near the Farm buildings. He fully intended carrying out the last express wish of the late owner, even though it had never got beyond the bounds of the satin bag, or gone through legal formularies. But he wanted to do it by letter on his return home. The idea of any personal intercourse with the Amtmann's niece, this fine lady governess, was absolutely intolerable to him.

Indeed, he wished for no society whatever in his present solitude, the sweets of which he was tasting for the first time. Yet, he was anything but blasé; the turmoil of the great city had a thousand charms for him, and he enjoyed its pleasures with his whole soul, for he was still quite young, and life flowed healthfully through his veins. Still, after all



the excitement of the previous season, and the noisy tumult of his workshop, it seemed to him simply delicious to subside into the soothing quietude of the woods.

He had discovered a pet retreat at the Hirschwinkel in the little pavilion that stood at the north-west side of the garden door. Octagon in form, it afforded a view through two windows and as many doors, in every direction under heaven. The inner walls were painted in faded fruit and flowers on a grey ground, a cosy little sofa with a small round table in front of it, a few cane chairs, and a bookshelf, formed the entire furniture; over the upper part of both doors and windows were festoons of purple calico, which shed a magic light through the little room. A small balcony with a wooden railing ran along the western side from one of the glass doors, and—this it was which constituted the chief charm in its new owner's eyes—a few little steps led down from it direct into the open fields outside the garden. Nothing but a narrow strip of green ran along under the wall there, and the nodding ears of the neighbouring corn-field waved across it.

Herr Markus was sitting writing in this same pavilion on the fourth day after his arrival. He had transported a considerable number of the choicest works from the "Library" over there, as well as writing materials and several bookshelves, thereby adding considerably to the general comfort of this tiny bower. He had just lighted a cigar, and its blue clouds dissipated the perfume of camomile and lavender which the morning breeze wafted towards him from the Frau Oberforstmeisterin's herb garden. He was sitting on the little sofa opposite the balcony door, he had but to raise his eyes and before him lay the road, which, passing in front of the Manor House, ran in a straight line through the middle of the fields, and was only lost to view far far away in the shadow of the wood. One narrow path only branched off to the right, leading behind a small fir plantation, to The Farm. Advancing along this very footpath, a female form suddenly came within the range of his vision—it was the maid from the farm. He recognised her at once by her walk and deportment, albeit she wore, in addition to the ominous white kerchief—designated by Frau

Griebel, winkers—a broad brimmed straw hat shading her face. She was walking slowly, and her eyes were bent on the ground; in her left hand she carried a rake, and with her right she played with the green ears of corn as she passed along. The girl's figure stood out in strong relief against the golden background of the solitary sunlit landscape. She was evidently on her way to turn the hay in that distant meadow, where but a few days previously she had been busy mowing. He watched her as she came nearer and nearer, all unconscious of the hidden spectator following her every movement intently. Herr Markus had thought no more about the girl who had been so chary of rendering him the necessary aid upon the bridge, but at that moment the curt brusque manner in which she had got rid of him recurred to his mind, and tempted him to try his luck once more with the little prude.

He rose and went to the door, while she, having almost reached the garden wall, suddenly stopped and took a letter from her pocket. She seemed in search of some of the servants belonging to the place, but neither in front of the house nor yet at any of the win-

dows was a human creature visible. She therefore decided on coming by way of the grass path under the garden wall, with the evident intention of getting round to the back buildings where the maids were occupied in the stalls.

At that moment Herr Markus made his appearance on the balcony, he ran lightly down the steps and barred her path. She started as if the ground had opened before her, and let the rake fall in her surprise.

"That letter is intended for some one here, is it not?" he said smiling. "Give it to me and I will deliver it," and he stretched out his hand for the small missive.

She gave him the letter without a word.

"Bless me, why, it is for myself," he exclaimed, glancing at the address. "From whom?"

She stooped to pick up the rake.

"Not from your master," he continued, as no answer came.

"Yes, from the Amtmann," she replied, in the half curt, half nervous manner he had already observed in her.

He shook his head.

“What an elegant lady’s hand the old gentleman writes to be sure.”

“That is not his writing—he suffers from his eyes.”

“Ah, indeed; then he dictated it, and one of the ladies—the governess most probably—wrote it for him.” He held the address away from him for inspection. “Pretty delicate characters on snow white paper, just such as befits a lady who wouldn’t touch a duster or a kitchen utensil for all the world.”

She threw back her head, and he was hoping for a sharp retort, but in vain, her head sank again upon her bosom and she was silent.

“You’re very much attached to your young lady, I suppose?” he enquired, putting his lighted cigar once more to his lips.

“I think not,” she replied, retreating a step or two as if to avoid the curls of blue smoke that suddenly enveloped her head.

How absurd! A girl accustomed to inhale clouds of the coarsest tobacco amongst her fellows in public places, pretended to be annoyed and disgusted, as if she possessed a lady’s delicate nerves. No doubt at all about it, she was imitating the fine lady governess.

This first thoroughly roused his ire, and he gave one or two lusty puffs.

“You don’t think so?” he repeated, “but you are pleased with her refined manners notwithstanding, I suppose. You’d give a great deal to be like her, wouldn’t you?”

“That would be a strange wish.”

“Why so? Taking care of pretty hands and being waited on in a nice cool room is surely preferable to working in the hay-field, and being shrivelled up by toiling in the sun?”

“Do you think that the young lady does nothing then?”

“Oh dear, no, by no means,” he replied in a tone of raillery. “I have no doubt she is industrious in gathering wild flowers with carefully gloved hands, either for the purpose of arranging them tastefully in nosegays, or for painting in water colours; she, very likely, works lace too, writes and reads and practices her exercises with exemplary regularity, to the delight of those who suffer from nerves. Am I right?”

“Partly,” she replied, drawing the straw hat still further over her eyes. The fingers

that touched the rim of the hat were pretty and slender, but brown as berries.

“Further,” he continued with a good humoured smile, “I’m certain she’s a right good judge whether or not you have thoroughly swept out her room and put it in order; she knows how to appreciate your success too in some dainty sweetmeat, or the meat being ‘done to a turn’.”

A low laugh escaped from beneath the kerchief, and the girl answered in a few minutes without hesitation: “I know she is very seldom satisfied with me”.

“You fail perhaps in the becoming respect, little one. Does Miss Blue-stocking make you pay for that?”

“Oh, not on that account, but she often reproaches me bitterly, when my powers will not keep pace with my will.”

He let the hand holding his cigar fall, and his eye sought to pierce through hat and handkerchief, with an air of surprise. “You use singularly choice language for a girl in your position,” he said, listening attentively.

She started in apparent affright, and stretched out her hand deprecatingly.

“Oh, true, I forgot. You are no village maiden,” he added, passing his hand across his brow and through his rich hair. “You were in service in some good family in town, and something of the old manners clings to you still. Your young mistress brought you with her, I hear—you lived in the same house, did you not?”

The girl hesitated a moment before answering. “Well, yes, we lived in the same house, at General von Guseck’s in Frankfurt,” and she turned away her head, as she mechanically caught at some of the ears of corn near her. “We were always together, and I discharged the duties of a lady’s maid, such as a ‘spoilt fine lady governess’ requires, and because she and I are inseparable ——”

“You accompanied her here into the midst of poverty,” he said, completing the sentence. “You are a strange girl; you maintain that you’re not particularly attached to your young lady, and yet, in plain English, you stick by her through thick and thin. There must be some kind of magic about her, like the rat-catcher of Hameln. Is she pretty?”

She bent over a sheaf of corn she had been



gathering and shrugged her shoulders. "How can one judge of what stands in such near ——"

"Sphinx," he exclaimed, drawing nearer to her, "you want to make her interesting in my eyes with your sibyl-like answers. Lost labour, little girl, this governess halo has no charms for me; whenever I can I will avoid her. But there is one thing I desire—I should like to see her 'double'." Before she knew what he was about, he had seized both hat and handkerchief with daring hand and raised them from her face, but no sooner had he done so than he drew back in amazement and affright—the face he had seen was one of startling beauty.

She drew on her shroud again with an exclamation of rage, and fled past him. When she had got a little distance away, however, she stopped and said, over her shoulder, in a trembling voice, "You go on ridiculing the lady at The Farm on account of her intellectual occupations, and me, you have just shown by your behaviour, how much a woman is degraded in your eyes by the work I submit to. Is that manly conduct?" Herewith, she turned her back again on him, and hurried

away so fast that she had soon disappeared from his sight.

He bit his lip with anger, and pitched his cigar far across the field. He no longer understood either himself or his actions, and his step-mother who was always abusing him for making game of her young lady acquaintances, and rallying him on the effort it cost him to touch one of those "tight-laced demoiselles" even in the dance, what amazement would have filled her bosom could she have beheld the humiliating position he had placed himself in. But it had come upon him like a species of intoxication—the witchery had lain in the voice issuing from the mystic gloom of that strange disguise, like some interesting riddle.

He sprang up the steps with quite as great rapidity as he had descended them, and banging the glass door behind him strode to the window. What could have upset him so thoroughly? Was it really such a crime to have touched that straw hat and the winkers? But, for that one glimpse he had taken, he had been corrected like one uninitiated who had ventured to profane the sacred precincts. This girl worked in the fields—was she not

compelled to brave the free glance of every labouring man who stopped to ask the way—then, to be sure, she was also “lady’s maid” at the farm. She had “a smattering of culture”; she was undeniably intelligent, and gifted by nature with great quickness. She therefore regarded herself, very probably, almost like one of the Amtmann’s family, even though she carried fodder home on her head, and was obliged to bestir herself in field and meadow.

Do what he would, to look at the matter on the humorous side and think of it all as a good joke, he could not shake off the unpleasant sensation of having received a lesson which would annoy him all the days of his life. That day was completely spoiled for him at all events.

## CHAPTER V.

THESE unpleasant reflections were disturbed by Peter Griebel's entrance ; he had just returned from the fields, and rubbing his hands with delight, announced to Herr Markus that the line marked out by the engineer for the new railroad would pass through the valley yonder, leaving the arable land at the side untouched. Amtmann Franz had kicked up a tremendous row about it ; Peter Griebel himself had heard his vehement protest against it, his arguments and his bluster. The line, however, was going to run direct through the farmyard, and so near indeed to the south side of the house, that a few years more would see the rotten old building a mere heap of stones.

This announcement reminded Herr Markus of the letter he had in his pocket, which he had quite forgotten in his encounter with the maid.

He opened it and looked it over, half amused, half annoyed with its contents—the

good folk at the farm appeared incorrigibly insolent, one and all of them, from the master down to the maid. An extraordinary set truly, an absurd mixture of chicanery, pretension and prudery. The Amtmann completely ignored the fact that he had received notice to quit a whole year before, through Herr Markus's solicitor. He proceeded to deal categorically with the lax behaviour of the landlord in reference to the Railway question, by which he, his tenant, would be materially injured, to protest that nothing would induce him to remove the farmyard to the back premises, neither would he consent to see his house one fine day fall in about his ears. Finally, he alluded in a few passing words to the fact, that "his morsel of rent" was still due, but that he was in daily expectation of a large sum of money, which his son a wealthy man in California, had unaccountably delayed sending—immediately on receipt of it, this trifle would be settled.

"Aye, aye, that's the Amtmann all over," laughed Peter Griebel good-humouredly when Herr Markus had finished reading him the letter; "he's a silly prater."

“A silly prater? What gentle phrases you do make use of, Peter—a big swaggerer, that’s what he is,” put in his wife, who had just been cutting parsley in the garden and had just clambered up to the top of the pavilion steps, where she was standing and shaking her bunch of parsley with an admonitory gesture in at the door. “For goodness sake, have nothing to do with that set, Herr Markus. They’ll go on at you till you don’t know whether you’re standing on your head or your heels. The old fellow’s just like an ostrich too, and thinks when he shuts his own eyes, that nobody can see the ruin he has brought on himself and his family—he’s only trying to throw dust in your eyes too, about that son in California, just as he’s done with every fool he has borrowed money from—likely indeed, that the son of such an old swindler should be worth anything.”

“Don’t paint things so black, Zetchen, that’s not like you,” said her husband. “The Frau Oberforstmeisterin told me herself that young Franz was a good fellow, and that nothing but misery and indignation at the wretched mismanagement going on here, had driven him

out into the world. He sent home a large sum of money once ; since then, it is true, nothing has ever been heard of him, and his poor mother has nearly fretted herself to death about it."

"There now, you can judge for yourself, Herr Markus," said Frau Griebel satirically, pointing at the speaker with her thumb. "The man has the face to expect we'll think a lad respectable who can't even take pen and paper to write to his poor mother—na, Peter, you may wait a while for that," so saying, she clattered heavily down the steps, carrying herself and her parsley off to the kitchen.

Herr Markus kept pacing up and down the little pavilion long after Peter Griebel had retired to an adjacent arbour, where his little daughter waited on him with bread and butter, sausage, and a glass of golden Nordhäuser, which she had laid out for his luncheon on a stone table.

Since the receipt of the Amtmann's letter, the affair of the legacy, which had fallen so accidentally into the new owner's hands, had assumed a new aspect. Only that morning, he had imagined that an interview with his

solicitor, immediately before his departure and a few letters from Berlin, would suffice to give effect to his aunt's last wishes, without necessitating any personal intercourse with the recipient, such as was so repugnant to him. But a new person had suddenly appeared on the scene—there was a son in existence, of whom, as Peter Griebel repeatedly assured him, the deceased lady had entertained a very good opinion, and yet her last disposition did not contain one syllable about him. Was he too, pliant and soft-hearted like his mother, equally unable to cope with the Amtmann's reckless mode of action, and had the testatrix consequently dreaded that this last anchor in their trouble would be insecure in his hands?

Judged by this standard, the old lady must have had a great respect for the character of the girl in whose charge she wished to leave the future of her early friend. Herr Markus could not understand this delusion. The deceased had been industry and energy personified. On the farm or in the dairy, in the kitchen or in the laboratory, by the sick-bed or at the writing or work-table, at each and all she had ever seemed in her right place,



and never had the idea occurred to her that any hand but her own should arrange so much as a ribbon of her dress or a lock of her hair. What on earth then, had put it into the head of this practical, active woman, to entrust with such a task, a girl of whom he had but just now heard, that even in the present disorganised state of affairs, she persisted in the same self-indulgent habits, would move neither hand nor foot to assist in this reduced household, and even demanded the offices of lady's maid from the girl who was obliged to toil early and late in the house as well as in the fields ?

He cursed the "stupid fancy," that had led him to inspect the contents of the old work-bag. Would that he had had the sense to let the antediluvian furniture moulder away in a corner. And now he had actually grown so hopelessly idiotic as to take the old lady's fate at The Farm to heart, and regard a conscientious sifting of this matter as his bounden duty. One thing was certain—with all her clear insight into character and disposition, the Frau Oberforstmeisterin had been thoroughly deceived in the heir she had selected—possibly

a comedy had been played before her—would it not be better to correct her mistake and give the little inheritance to young Franz? If once a rumour of this legacy got wind, who could answer for it, but that some suitor might present himself for this “fine lady’s” hand? Small chance of any hesitation on Miss Governess’s part; strangers then would reap the benefit to the poor invalid’s detriment.

He ran his hands fiercely through his hair. There was nothing else for it then, but to take the bull by the horns and inspect the state of affairs at the Amtmann’s with his own eyes, governess and all.

He continued out of sorts all day, but towards evening took his hat for a stroll through the woods. What he liked best, was to work his way through the dense thicket, a roof of deep green overhead and straggling brambles under foot; and when the somewhat damp but invigorating perfume of the woods greeted him, and the illimitable tangle of leaves rustled in offended majesty, as he forced his way through, it would call up an ironical smile as he remembered the terraces his father had rescued, with so much labour, from the sandy marshes. How

deceptively did the plots of green turf extend in front of the Villa, and the smooth paths hedged in by artificial bosquets, resembling hypocritical stage scenes, ending, despite all the artistic devices, in nothing but the melancholy disappointment of a sandy waste.

A road, frequented only by woodmen and their carts, divided the Hirschwinkel estate from a place called The Grafenholz, the Prince's hunting chase. Close to this road the valley ended and the wood of noble beech began, covering the steep ascent densely; between it and the road there was only one small patch of meadow; on this grassy spot stood the keeper's house. It was a pretty, new building, made of tiles, with large windows, and a wooden paling at the side, which enclosed a tiny scrap of garden ground, about the size of two little beds.

Herr Markus had paused here before on one or two occasions, and he did the same now, as he saw the red walls suddenly emerging out of the thicket. The keeper, to whom the house belonged, must have led the life of a hermit; at anyrate, he was not married, and took away the house-key in his pocket when he went off

on his business. The door never stood hospitably open, not a suspicion of smoke ever curled about the chimney, not a face was ever seen at the window, where nothing but a few flower-pots were visible on the sills inside, no attempt at decoration in the way of pretty curtains, neither was there ever the faintest sound of any one moving about in the house, the only signs of life were at the gable window, where three or four wooden cages were filled with finches and cross-bills making a noise, and two thievish goats, belonging of course to the keeper, who were clambering up the steep declivity at the back of the house. The new-comer at The Hirschwinkel had often longed to take a peep in at the window, simply to discover what kind of reading this whilome labourer indulged in, in the few scant moments he could snatch from his severe toil and the aid he rendered at The Farm. If it was stories of knights and freebooters that lay piled up between the flower-pots on the narrow ledge, they certainly did not wear the garb of the lending library; that much he could see across the road, which was not above ten paces broad at the most. Possibly this wood-ranger was a man of intelligence and

culture, he was much at The Farm, where, even the maid, who had to go about with milk cans and hay-rakes, expressed herself in language best fitted for the drawing-room.

With a contemptuous smile on his lips, he was about to burst through the last barrier and spring into the road, when the demeanour of one of the goats made him hesitate. It was a slim, young animal, and began to run like mad down the slope and across the meadow, its companion trotted leisurely after, but also in exactly the same direction, whence light footsteps now became audible.

Herr Markus stamped with rage, that girl again, it began to spoil his visit to the forest completely. Was then Amtmann's maid the only woman who lived or breathed in wood or field?

Oh, there she was again, the winkers on her head and a large market basket on her arm; the goats were trotting beside her, eating bread out of her hand, which she had furbished out of her pocket for their dainty appetites.

Herr Markus drew further back amongst the trees, behind the nearest beech, he did not wish to renew the irritation of the morning.

He absolutely detested the girl, and, as in the morning he had positively puffed the tobacco smoke under her white kerchief, as studiously did he now endeavour to stamp out all trace of his cigar, lest the faintest breath of it might disclose his presence.

The girl threw the remaining crumbs to the goats and mounted the steps to get a peep in at the west window. The room must have been empty ; neither did repeated tapping on the panes bring any answer ; the door remained fastened. There was nothing for it but to wait patiently.

Setting her basket down beside her, she seated herself on the green bench near the hall door, no doubt to await the keeper's return. She untied the handkerchief under her chin and let the wrap fall behind her. So then, there she was, from head to foot, every inch Amtmann's conceited maid, who wouldn't allow the faintest ray of sun to tan her fair face, as Frau Griebel bitterly maintained, and Herr Markus, angry though he was, was fain to confess it had been a pity to spoil that delicate, though somewhat pale complexion ; he was compelled to admit, in confirmation of his

momentary glimpse that morning, that the head was not one whit behind the form, either in nobility or grace, but, on the contrary, harmonized completely. That filled up the measure of his wrath. He would have given anything she had squinted or had coarse, freckled features.

She smoothed back the hair, which had got loose, from her forehead and wound it in at the back, where it was gathered in a thick knot and fastened with a comb ; then, taking a deep breath, she folded her hands in her lap, and evidently refreshed by the intense repose of the woods, leaned her head against the wall. She looked anxious, if not actually depressed, but was, of course, too active and energetic to spend more than a few moments absolutely quiet.

She took a parcel from the basket, opened it and spread it out before her, with a critical eye. Herr Markus could see that it was a white lace shawl, most probably some cast-off rag belonging to the " Lady Governess," which was going to do duty once more round the white throat. The nimble fingers turned and twisted the discoloured web in every direction, it looked almost as if she patted it affectionately

with her right hand. Suddenly she looked round, rolled the lace up quickly and rose.

A fine looking man, in a green coat, was coming along the road. When he saw who was waiting he quickened his pace ; the dog too, who had been trotting wearily beside him, now rushed forward and sprang on the girl barking with joy.

“The rest here at your hermit’s cell is delicious, Fritz—but I am glad you’re come ; I am in a hurry,” she said, copying her young mistress to a nicety, no doubt ; for there was just that amount of kindly reserve in her mode of returning the new-comer’s civil greeting as Miss Blue-stockings would probably have shown towards their former labourer.

“I have a pressing commission for you,” she went on, “but first, I must give you something nice.” She stopped and gave him a small roll out of the basket. “I baked to-day, and it was such a success, that you must have a piece too. I’ve got over that now, Fritz, and I can laugh over my first attempts at kneading dough, when my clumsy fingers could produce nothing better than a few stony, black lumps out of the oven.”



“Aye, there were tears in plenty then, despite all your resolution,” replied the young man with a pleasant smile. He laid the bread down on the window-sill and kept looking all the time intently at the girl. “Must this be done again? Is it the Jew or the jeweller in L——?” he enquired immediately, no doubt in reference to the commission.

“Oh, you know well, we’ve had nothing to trouble the jeweller with, this long time past—you must go to the Jew—eight thalers must be forthcoming the day after to-morrow.”

The man ran his hands through his hair, as if at his wit’s end

“Indeed, Fritz, we have kept watch more like policemen than anything else, but for all that, a commercial traveller managed to effect an entrance and dispose of a few boxes of choice cigars. They are all smoked out except a very few, and now, in come the bills and threatening letters, and to-day a summons which has been taken out against us.”

“Heavens above, I have a good deal of patience, but still in process of time one gets worn out, and anger gets the better of a man when he sees the same old story over and over

again, and things going on just as if the purse was full as in days of old."

A melancholy expression quivered about the girl's lips. "How can we help it, Fritz?" and she gave a feeble smile. "There you are, poking your nose every spare minute into your scientific studies, and haven't made the discovery yet, that since the world began, water wont flow up-hill. Age doesn't destroy old tastes and old habits."

"But such wicked frivolity in such an old man."

"Silence," she burst out imperiously with a gesture of command. "It does not beseem either of us to be his judge; we have had experience of nothing but his kindness and consideration. Here," and she unfolded the the lace shawl, "here is still something valuable, priceless old lace. I have been assured it would be considered cheap at twenty thalers,\* from Baruch Mendel, of course, we cannot ask more than half that."

"Will he take it at all, I wonder," said the man, with an incredulous glance at the flimsy cobweb. "He certainly bought the two silk

\* £3.

dresses and the shawl, but such airy trash as that—I think he'll laugh at me. A few more silver spoons is what I propose."

"The last!" exclaimed the girl in disgust. "What are you thinking of? Do you expect me to lay a leaden spoon beside her plate? That will never happen so long as I can put one foot before the other. You don't understand these kind of things, Fritz," she added more calmly, as she folded up the lace and handed it to him. "Just go straight to the Jew—he knows all about lace just as well as he knows about money—can you make time to go to town to-morrow; perhaps you have business there yourself?"

"And even if not—I'll manage it somehow, you know."

"Yes, I know you are a good, true-hearted man."

This simple praise, uttered in a tone of deep feeling, appeared to embarrass the young man. He twisted his cap about awkwardly and pulled at the badge. "They're there to-day, surveying the ground for the railroad, are they not?" he said, turning the subject.

"Yes, and it caused a terrible piece of work

with us, as you may suppose. It has been an odious day altogether." She paused and bit her under lip.

"I believe you. But it's absurd of the old master to excite himself that way about the matter. He'll never live to see the plates laid down in the yard or the engine running round the angle of the house. The new-comer at the place will soon make a clean sweep of it, and—well, he has a right to do it."

"Yes, a perfect right," she added hardly. "What does he care about the old ties?"

"Aye, indeed, right enough. What does a young autocrat like that care about a friendship he never saw? No one can even reproach him about it. I saw him yesterday in passing by; a handsome man and fresh, a little brusque, like all those monied men, they have it even more than the real gentry—I know the tone well enough, from the days when I was an officer's servant. He was standing with Farmer Griebel at the mill—well, goodness knows, it's rickety enough."

The girl turned away as if she hardly heard what young Fritz was saying, and took up the white shroud to throw over her head again.

“But this revolution at the Hirschwinkel cuts me to the heart, for all that,” he added. “The house at The Farm is not one bit safer than the one at the mill—and that is the best possible excuse for making away with it.”

“Very well,” said the girl harshly, as she tied the handkerchief with trembling fingers under her chin. “Let him turn us out of doors, so be it—well and good, the only thing that puzzles me, and that I keep thinking over all night long is, how to make the poor invalid ——” her voice failed her.

“Oh, that’s the smallest part of it,” he replied, an honest smile breaking over his bearded face, “do you take me for such a reed that I can’t even carry that poor fragile form a bit? I’ll carry her for miles, the dear old lady, so that she shall feel neither ache nor pain in her poor, weary limbs. And its none so far either to this house. The best room to the south is large and light—her bed can stand there, and she’ll be able to look out at the fresh green on both sides. Then the old master ’ll find it much pleasanter at the window here, than yonder at the farm; there’s a bit of a stir going on now and then, while over at The

Farm there's nothing left to look at but the empty yard and the few remaining hens scratching about and cackling—— ”

“ Fritz, you are true as gold, but—— ”

“ Then there's the little gable room,” he went on without heeding the interruption, and pointing up at the window where the bird-cages were hanging——“ that is the prettiest in the whole house ; I'll have a little stove put up there, so that a young lady could paint there, summer and winter, and earn a pretty penny in her leisure hours. So you see, there need be no talk about beggary this many a day to come——only keep up your heart, that's the chief thing.”

“ Yes, that I will,” she replied with decision and a soupçon of defiance. “ I won't let fickle fortune get the better of me : as yet I don't know what mental weariness is, and the strength of youth lies in my hands. Nobody shall know it, at any rate, if now and then the proper pride is not as ready as it ought to be. Besides, are you not there, Fritz, my trusty ally ? ”

She took up her basket. “ I must be off now, there's plenty of work awaiting me at

home, and I have some ironing to do besides. The dear invalid must and shall have clean bed curtains up to-morrow ; but I am come to the end of my store of cones"—and a smile like sunshine broke over her face—"so here I am with this shameless basket again."

He laughed and taking the basket and the bread from the window-sill at the same time, hastened to open the house. He returned in a few moments laden. Through the wood, at all events, he said he would carry the load, turning away as she endeavoured to take it from him, so off they set together, walking side by side. A splendid pair truly, exactly suited to each other ; the dog too, trotted along at the girl's other side, as if she were his master's property, and must be jealously guarded between them.

Herr Markus sprang from his lurking place in the thicket, and watched them intently, till they were lost to view at a turning in the road ; then his eye scanned the house drearily—how long would it last before nice curtains were draped about those windows and a pretty young wife looking out of them. What a preposterous medley, these polished manners

borrowed from the great world, and the baking, washing, and scrubbing proper to the future Frau Forstwärterin.\*

Nevertheless, so would it be! This pair toiled and laboured with their united strength for the sake of their impoverished employers, and this trusty companionship would finally result in marriage. What more natural? What, indeed, could a servant-maid come from afar, expect more? As a wife she would have a certain position, a pretty home in the forest, a handsome husband, who aspired after learning and culture, and who "poked his nose into scientific studies".

This enigmatical girl would then have the beloved nonentity under her own roof. She would wait upon her then as now, and carefully guard the few remaining silver-spoons, so that her dainty lips might not be contaminated by contact with common leaden ones. The lovely nosegays of wild flowers could be painted up in the little gable room as the Keeper had said—not so fast, Mr. Green-coat, its not come to that yet. The man of the money bags with his soldierly "brusquerie,"

\* Keeper.



does not mean to be outdone by anybody, least of all by his Princely Highness's well-berthed Keeper, and least of all is it his intention by turning his needy tenant at once out of doors, to prepare for him the pleasure of speedy nuptials with Amtmann's maid—that extraordinary girl, of whom one is often compelled to think that not the manners but the garb is what has been assumed—the honest keeper was altogether out of his reckoning there.

At one light bound Herr Markus regained the thicket, and turning his back on the silent house, retraced his steps once more.

Meantime the gold-green light of evening had almost died out in the wood, and with it, the soothing charm of solitude. The deep shadows stealing along under the bushes seemed to extend their gloom to the human mind. Herr Markus felt even more put out than in the morning, and woe betide the unlucky twig or stray branch that ventured to hit against his gloomy visage—they were torn off in a rage and flung far away.

## CHAPTER VI.

HE was only acting like thousands of Egoists. The demands of religion, and possibly also a sleepy sort of love for mankind in general, prompt them to give alms of what they possess, only let no one expect any personal intercourse with those to be assisted. They will go any distance out of their way, rather than be brought into contact with unpleasant circumstances, to avoid getting the threads of other lives mixed up with theirs, but, let their own self-love once be called into action and in they plunge, head-foremost. Was it not his self-love which had been wounded and that impelled him now to get before-hand with that detested Ranger at any cost? Was he not longing to rush to The Farm, on the spot; a place hitherto studiously avoided, and introduce himself to the old spendthrift, the boaster, the notorious gambler, to the whole family, and entreat one and all, for Heaven's sake, not to think so ill of him. Nothing but vanity and a kind

of resentment against that green-coat, who was figuring as true as steel,—hadn't the girl said so—but who was really only pretending to make sacrifices, that he might feel his way towards what he was longing for——”

In his rage, he plunged on still faster than before through the underwood, till he finally emerged on a little beaten track that brought him into the high road leading to the Manor. Just as he got out he saw Frau Griebel coming along towards him from the Schneide Mill.

She was carrying a fishing net on her arm ; it did not look quite so poetic there as on the slender prude's. A far heavier load too was weighing down the meshes than the little trout intended for the invalid's dinner.

“ Well, Herr Markus, I really think you're bent on crossing me,” she said, in undisguised annoyance. “ Couldn't you have wandered about the forest a little longer, till I got safe home and prepared my trout. Now, you'll have to wait and grow tired of looking at the table ready laid. However, it can't be helped, and as you've seen it now, just look here, trout for supper, the finest the miller had in his pond. Louisa has made fresh butter, and

about half an hour ago, some new potatoes arrived. A friend of mine, the Castle gardener, where my husband was steward three years ago, sent me a small dish for you, just for old times' sake. New potatoes, Herr Markus, at this time of year!" She broke off suddenly and came to a standstill. "But what's all this? Visitors again on the high road," she said grimly, pointing to a figure leaning against the trunk of a tree which had fallen right across the carriage tracks. "Times are really awful now. Drunken tradesmen are constantly lying about the roads, like so many flies, and a person needs be careful that they don't tread on them and put an end to them. That ought not to be, and it need not be, and if you were ten times over a manufacturer, Herr Markus, I say it to your face, it's the factory work, and the everlasting talk about war that causes it all. Numbers are turned away and have no redress, and then this vice gets the better of them, they themselves scarcely know how. Then follow tirades against such ruin and exhortations to reform. Oh, its easy talking with a full stomach."

All this time they had been gradually coming

up to the person lying on the ground. Herr Markus stooped and looked into the man's wan face, who opened his half unconscious eyes with great difficulty, and gave a timid, scared look at the speaker.

"But this man is not drunk at all," said Herr Markus, feeling for the pulse in the hand hanging so nervelessly down.

"My faith, so I see. Good gracious, here am I talking about new potatoes, while a human being lies starving at our doors! Aye, aye, just as I am always saying, God's gifts are strangely divided in this world." She searched in her pocket and produced a roll which she held to the man's lips. "Here friend, take a good bite at it; it'll do you as much good as fresh oil in a lamp."

A faint flush rose to the man's pale cheek as it had done at the word "starving," and he raised his hand, feebly attempting to ward it off.

"My goodness, lad, don't be going on like a girl," said Frau Griebel angrily. "Hunger is written that plainly on your face, a person could see it a mile off, and there you'd like to persuade us you'd had lampreys for breakfast.

Eat some of the roll, can't you ; it'll help you on your legs so far that we'll be able to get you up to the house, and there, I have some fine, strong soup left from dinner, and you shall have a good bed to lie upon, too."

"Try and eat a little," said Herr Markus kindly. Thereupon the man took the bread, but at the first mouthful lost all self-control, and eat with avidity, apparently forgetful of everything about him. He was a handsome young man, with a rich, auburn beard that covered his breast. His clothes were worn, but he was evidently particular as to cleanliness, and had probably given his last farthing for the clean, white colour he wore.

"Aye, aye, many's the poor woman at home, if they only saw this," said Frau Griebel, with a pointed nod of her head at the stranger ; "many's the mother who thinks no bed soft enough, no food good enough for her youngster, and afterwards——"

She paused involuntarily, for the young man seized his hat, which had tumbled off in the fall, as hurriedly as his weakness allowed, and crushed it down on his head, as if to hide his face from the spectators.

“Well, young man, you need not take that so amiss,” continued Frau Griebel, in her usual deliberate mode of speech. “Many a one has been out fighting his way in the world, or camped in a ditch by the roadside on an empty stomach, that has turned out right well at home, afterwards—there now, let us see if we can’t get you on your legs again.”

“I have been lying ill, in hospital, for six weeks,” he murmured, almost inaudibly, “and am coming——”

“Aye, aye, it’s easy seeing you’ve been ill,” said Frau Griebel, “and you’ve no call to say where you come from or where you’re going to. You must stay the night at the Manor. You want a little sleep as much as you do food, and to-morrow we’ll see what next. Now, courage, let us try.”

She took him lustily by the arm, and Herr Markus went to his other side, between them they succeeded in getting the young man on his feet, but he was still too weak to walk alone. He allowed himself to be drawn along unresistingly, but the expression of quiet despair, so plainly written on his face, showed how conscious he was of his pitiful condition.

They were mowing the large meadow before the house, and the swathes of sweet hay were being tossed about, while two of the maid servants out of the house were busy raking it into lap-cocks.

They stood still and gaped as they saw this singular group approaching, and Louisa who was standing at the hall-door in a pink dress and white apron, looking out for her mother and the trout, fled towards them with such rapidity and alarm, that the long fair plaits hanging down her back literally danced.

“Has he met with an accident, mother?” she enquired timidly, her pretty blue eyes peeping in alarmed compassion from under her broad-brimmed hat.

The young man’s bearded face grew crimson under her gaze, and he made a superhuman effort to straighten himself and to walk alone—in vain. Frau Griebel called one of the gaping girls over to take her place beside this helpless being, so that she might be able to go on and make the necessary preparations for him herself in the house. The girl came a few steps nearer, but grumbled, and answered spitefully that no family she had ever lived with



had ever asked her to pick up beggars in the street, or lead a drunken tradesman home as if he were a prince. She had on clean clothes, and didn't wish to soil them.

The stranger gave a moan.

At that sound Louisa stretched out her round white arm to undertake the Samaritan task herself.

“Get away with you, you young goose,” said Frau Griebel, half laughing, but gazing at the same time with fond delight at her one darling as she declined her aid. “Your doll's arm would make a sturdy staff, a robin red-breast would do nearly as well—quick, run into the house, put the saucepan with the remains of to-day's soup upon the fire, and sheet the large bed in the soldier's chamber. Later on I shall have a word to say to you,” she added, to the pert servant maid who had already returned to the hay. “This day month you leave the Hirschwinkel, you may as well know it.”

Half an hour afterwards the poor worn-out man was lying on a good bed. A leafy pear tree in the yard was peeping in at the window of the room on the ground-floor, known by

the name of the soldier's chamber, and the evening breeze playing amongst the tree tops made a gentle current, filling the tidy room with the cool country air. The gobbling turkeys had gone to roost, and nothing was to be seen on the wall dividing the two yards except a white cat dressing himself.

Herr Markus had, for the first time, taken the keys out of the press in the bow-room, and himself made a descent on the late Frau Oberforstmeisterin's wine cellar, to fetch a bottle of the precious old nectar stored away in a dark corner for the sick and needy. The sick man had eaten, and drunk some of the madeira, but not a syllable had passed his lips, and in proportion as the good food and stimulant revived his sinking frame, the deeper grew the despair in his face. His eye was fixed with longing gaze upon the open window, and Herr Markus guessed this poor man's first independent effort would be a leap out of the low window; he would vanish away, leaving no trace behind him, hoping that he and his misery would alike fade from the memory of those kind hearts who had assisted him.

A little later, however, nature asserted her

rights—he sunk into a deep sleep, and Herr Markus stole out of the room, and sought the pavilion where Frau Griebel had prepared his supper for him. He eat little, and thought the while of the new baked brown bread the keeper was enjoying at his table. How tenderly and loyally these people looked after each other, despite all their poverty. Frau Griebel was a worthy woman, an honest soul, and her heart was in the right place; still, the “little trout” and the “new potatoes” all cost him good money; the old miller had, certes, not given the fish out of pure love to him, any more than the castle gardener his new potatoes. Then, to fill up the measure of his grievances, the two maid-servants were raking away just at the corner of the garden, close under the arbour on the wall, where they kept up one incessant chatter.

“What are you talking about—much I care whether the old woman gives me warning or not,” said the rude girl who had just received notice to leave. “A person who can do their work as I can, is sure of another situation any day.”

“Not at this time of year,” put in the other.

“There’s not a place to be had in all Tillroda, and by-and-bye perhaps you’ll be obliged to knock under, and take a situation with people like those at the Farm ; not a penny of wages, and the work of a man in the fields.”

“What nonsense you talk—I’m sure the present one hasn’t such bad times of it. The keeper helps her whenever he can ; she has the best of it. And it can’t be altogether so bad with the wages either, for she always wears nice tidy leather boots—that much I’ve discovered though she does keep everyone at a distance, and makes as if the like of us weren’t fit to hold a candle to her.”

“Aye, she’s a conceited thing, that she is,” agreed the other. “I’d like to see how she’ll carry on when once she’s mistress at the Grafenholz—she’s in luck. An adventuress like that to get into such a pretty cosy nest.”

“She’s welcome as far as I am concerned. What do I care about the lot once I’m quit of the Hirschwinkel,” muttered the transgressor angrily, as she pitched a rakeful of hay on the nearest cock. “I’m only vexed at the old woman’s folly bringing home the first vagrant she finds lying on the road, putting him to

bed like a baby, and ending up by pouring the finest wine in the cellar down his throat. Of course, he has no objection ; but they're all mad at the Manor House. If one of us leaves a door open, they fly at us as if we were monsters—for fear of thieves—and then they go and fetch the rogues in themselves. How I should laugh if that fellow decamped in the morning with something in his pocket—it's just what the old cat deserves. I'd give a guinea to see the joke."

Here Herr Markus shut the pavilion window with a bang that made the pair of slanderers duck behind the hay-cocks like frightened quails, and devote themselves to their work with an energy that did not admit of a word.

This little spot of earth was a quiet sequestered nook, but even there, gentle peace was not allowed to fold her wings and rest. Envy, malice, and all the evil passions of the human heart, seemed as rife there, as in the theatre of the great world.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE following morning saw the Manor House early astir. Herr Markus saw pretty little Louisa wandering about on the new mown meadow. She wore a light morning gown, and her thick fair hair was gathered up in a white net with bows of blue ribbon. The young girl was evidently in search of something she had lost. She pushed aside the stray wisps of hay the night wind had scattered, and herself shook out the heaps lying near her. The two maid-servants who were just on their way to the field—they were carrying hoes—stood looking on and laughing.

“You never set foot in the hay yesterday evening, Miss Louisa—I ought to know,” said the girl who had got her dismissal. “You needn’t look a step further, it’s a pity to waste the time. We’re none of us so blind as to rake away your medallion. A gold thing like that glitters, and nobody in their senses could mistake a yard of black velvet ribbon for a blade

of grass, besides, I heard you with my own ears tell your mamma that you'd put your medallion as usual in the glass tray on the drawers. Now, all of a sudden, that's supposed to be a mistake, because every one in the place declares that nobody could have taken it except—well, I won't put my foot in it a second time."

"It's very wicked of you to say that, Rosa," burst out the young girl indignantly. "A man with such a good countenance couldn't steal," the childish voice was evidently struggling with tears. "Indeed, I never think those kind of things."

"Don't you. Pray then, why did he go and take French leave? So early too, without saying, 'with your leave or by your leave'. But it's all the same to me, it's no business of mine. I don't care where the medallion is, I haven't got it." So saying she shouldered her hoe and marched off to the field with her companion, while Louisa returned home with a downcast air.

"There now, Herr Markus, you see what one gets for doing a kindness," said Frau Griebel, when the master came down stairs

and looked her up in the kitchen. She was very busy making a cake, and was in anything but a good humour. "My husband has been here, laughing at me for being annoyed, and asking—you know the stupid kind of jokes he's always making—if I had been expecting a kiss of the hand in return for my hospitality about the soldier's room. Well, well, he's off, and no mistake, the stupid creature. He must have jumped out of the window at the first sound of cockcrow, and got off through the back-yard. It wasn't nice of a young fellow like that, though, whom his own mother couldn't have treated better than we did—these kind of things vex a person—and now my Louisa has been doing something foolish too; she's gone and lost the medallion the Frau Oberforstmeisterin gave her, and that's not the worst of it either, our people are saying we brought the thief in ourselves—the rude set are making game of us, and that doesn't look well."

"What a pity we didn't leave this bone of contention lying in the road," said Herr Markus slyly, with a roguish smile.

"Oh, God forbid," she said turning angrily



upon him, "I see you don't know the Griebel; it'll be the very same thing over again the next time. I'm only sorry the man has brought this on himself, for he was the son of respectable parents—a blind man could see that—and he really put me quite out with his miserable appearance. Only just look at my little girl there," and she nodded over her shoulder towards Louisa, who was standing at the kitchen door, chopping almonds—"she wont care much about the new cake to-day—the red eyes are not merely on account of her medallion—she's a silly little thing with a heart as soft as wax. Pity for that poor starving lad they accuse of stealing, keeps bringing the tears to her eyes." Herr Markus could not suppress a low laugh which made the fair head yonder bend still lower over the chopping board.

He left the kitchen and turned his steps towards the Farm. He set off at a swinging pace. Who could have foreseen, that first evening he set foot in the forest that he would soon be pursuing this "duty walk" with so much eagerness; nay more, that he would deem it requisite to hunt up the dandy

gloves he had laid aside for the occasion of his visit to Nurnberg, just to parade them on this occasion ! He walked along by the fir plantation, behind which lay the Farm—fields of corn extended on his left in rich luxuriance ; the stalks already reached nearly to his shoulder, the potatoe crop looked like a wood and was not far from blossoming, while a dreamy murmur floated over the yellow turnip fields, and heavily laden bees went buzzing past on their homeward way to the hives at the manor. The Hirschwinkel really possessed something of the blessedness of the Holy Land, which once flowed with milk and honey, and yet, want had succeeded in finding an entrance there. Yonder, at the other side of the plantation, there lay his domain. The corn was miserably poor, the weeds rampant and choking up the furrows ; the cattle on the Farm must have been reduced as far as possible, no industry could avail to reclaim such impoverished ground, not even though the Keeper, aided by the maid, spent all their strength in the endeavour.

If the deceased Frau Oberforstmeisterin's legacy was to fulfil its object, the first thing

to be done was to realize the savings invested in the Tillröder hotel and expend them on the wasted freehold. But then, would the fine lady governess consent to this? Would she not prefer to replace the silk dresses sold to the Jew, and to surround herself once more with all the luxuries she seemed habituated to in the Frankfurt General's house. Judging by the maid's description she seemed to bear a fatal resemblance to her uncle the Amtmann in this respect.

Well, in a few moments more he would see her face to face, and he would keep a sharp look out. Not one farthing should the young lady coax out of him, be she never so worldly wise or bewitchingly pretty. He was proof against this style of governess humility, behind which lurked, as he knew from experience, nothing but cupidity. The farm buildings stood right at the back of the fir plantation; they were one-storied, small in dimensions, and so old and dilapidated, that the rush by of an engine could not fail to lay them low in a very short time. On the south side there was a grass garden, and the little wicket gate in its white thorn hedge, opened into the plantation.

It was unlocked—Herr Markus opened it, walked in and went up the narrow pathway that ran through the centre of the grass plot, bright with wild flowers. A few tall pear-trees, and a beautiful mountain-ash threw their cool shadow over him. He passed an arbour too, a shady arbour formed of lime-tree branches intertwined, and containing a stone table and two rustic benches roughly knocked together. It was highly indecorous, and altogether unjustifiable for a new-comer like the master of the Hirschwinkel, to approach a table on which scissors, thimble and fine things to be mended, lay strewn about, and betrayed the presence of a lady. But there was an inkstand there also, and near it a thick manuscript book, lying wide open, that, no doubt, contained her lucubrations. In this leafy retreat, Miss Governess mounted her Pegasus, and made touching verses on Luna and Hesperus. Her spirit cast, as it were, a shadow before her; he felt the atmosphere of her folly even before he saw her; the next moment he burst into a low laugh, it was not poetry any way, his stolen glance had taken in ‘two pair of pigeons, sold in Tillroda—three

score eggs, do.' "Well, well, if he found her with 'ink on her thumb' on this occasion, the household accounts would be the guilty cause."

He pursued his way. The grass plot came to an end, and was replaced by a few vegetable beds in the corner; close up to the house, on the right grew a hedge, or rather plot of raspberry bushes, separating it from the yard; that was the spot where the rails were to be laid down. The poor remains of the poultry were scratching about, a dog began to bark, a door behind the plot was thrown open and something white was seen advancing through the brambles.

Herr Markus involuntarily drew on his right hand glove still tighter and quickened his pace to meet this lady in white, but it was only the maid, the sight of whom annoyed him to such an extent that it sent the blood to his head. She had tied a large white apron over her poverty-stricken dress, and turned up her sleeves, the meaningless neck-kerchief was absent and so were the wipers. Herr Markus stood stock-still, and she never saw him; she went straight to the vegetable beds and stooped down to cut a handful of herbs. It was only on

raising her head again that she discovered who was there. Her face crimsoned all over, and her first impulse was to pull down her long linen sleeves over her bare arms.

Instinctively he felt impelled to doff his hat before this slender form, just as he had intended to do to the supposed lady in white, but his ill-humour saved him from committing such a solecism, he, at least, would be no party to assisting this mysterious maiden in the fond delusion that he mistook her borrowed plumes for real gold. He accordingly only just raised his hat, and enquired, in a cold, business-like tone, for the Amtmann. At the same time, he looked steadfastly into her face, and into the clear, brown eyes, riveted on his with undisguised anxiety. No doubt, she thought the fatal moment had arrived for the illegal occupants of the farm to be sent "a begging".

In a low and humble tone, such as befitted the serving-maiden of the house, she replied that the Amtmann was at home, and would regard it as an honour to receive the new landlord.

"And Miss Agnes Franz?" he enquired.

She drew herself up at once, as if this one

simple question were an insult to her young lady. The assumed humility was all forgotten, and with downcast eyes she answered in a curt decided tone,

“You won’t see her.”

“What—is she gone?”

The shadow of a smile played round her lips.

“She is caught as fast as a bird in its cage.”

“Ah, there’s the mystical language again, with which you are wont to shroud the person of your young lady.” The “you” escaped him unawares. “Your sibyl wisdom, however, will soon be at an end; in a few moments more I shall see for myself what lies behind this ‘Bild von Sais’ ——”

“That you will not.”

“Not? And you know that positively, as positively as if you and your mistress were one heart and one soul?”

“Just as positively.”

He smiled a derisive smile.

“Well, it may be so—we all know how often the maid is the confidante of the mistress, why not of a governess also? Query, if the ladies like this familiarity to be talked about, though?”

She stooped to pick up some plants which had fallen out of the bunch she was holding, then she drew herself up to her full height, and her fine eyes flashed with an angry light.

“Is it not the correct thing that a lady’s maid should know to whom her mistress is at home, and she ——”

Suddenly she hesitated, coloured deeply, and bit her lip, as if that could unsay the sharp retort that had just escaped her; no doubt, it had just occurred to her, that the person alluded to as one to be denied admittance happened to be the owner of the house, and might at any moment deprive her proud young lady of the very roof over her head.

He enjoyed her embarrassment to the full, and made no attempt to assist her by one single syllable out of the scrape she had got into, albeit, this slender and now humbled maiden looked more like a frightened fawn than the “touch-me-not” he was accustomed to see in her—for all that, she must be punished.

“She does not wish anyone to intrude on the retirement she lives in,” came out after a long pause, in an abject tone.



"I don't believe that," he replied, wholly unmoved. "Governesses, who like before all things to swim with the stream of society in good families, are least of all qualified for the misanthropic life of a convent."

She drew herself up once more, and a bitter smile curled her lip.

"Perhaps," she said, "she's not quite so bad as those others, those blue stockings and self-seekers, to whom you owe your intimate knowledge of Governesses. Allow me too to remind you, that you yourself said but yesterday that you'd keep out of her way whenever you could."

"And she knows that?"

"Word for word."

"From you? of course. Tattling is the lady's maid's element. I did say so, however, very explicitly, and repeat again expressly, that I have no desire whatever to enter into any kind of intercourse with a lady whose position inspires me with absolute repugnance—I admit that, without hesitation—peculiar circumstances, notwithstanding, compel me to solicit half-an-hour's conversation with Fräulein Agnes Franz. I daresay, however, it can, after

all, be settled with the pen. I will write to her."

"And do you really suppose, after all that you have said about her, a missive from your hand would be received and read?"

"Certainly," he replied, his eyes beginning to flash, "the lady *must* do so: she will be obliged for the sake of her very existence."

She forgot her rôle of humility once more, and gave a hard laugh. "Obliged," she repeated. "To prevent her being turned out of this miserable hovel, I suppose? You may find yourself mistaken, sir; I believe she'd rather wander bare-foot through night and mist ——"

"She'll have no other alternative," he said, with difficulty restraining himself.

"Well," she exclaimed, her breath coming and going, "nothing better was to be expected of the Hirschwinkel's new master, we knew that this man without a heart, such as a practical business man ought to be, would arrive here one fine day, and turn the bad pays out—we knew you were just like the merciless rich man described in the Bible."

"And you, a servant, a girl of the people,

dare to tell him that to his face?" he interposed all at once grown calm, even cheerful. "Think a while, the Amtmann will hardly thank his servant-maid if she increases the difficulties of his position by her irritating language. Besides all that, anger misbecomes you, fair 'Touch-me-not'."

With these words, he drew a few steps nearer to her, she turned at once to fly.

"But still less such an exaggerated affectation of propriety," he added, frowning, and with flashing eye. "Don't go on as if I were a monster, because I ventured upon one occasion to take a peep under your hat. That was only caused by the desire which always lurks in human nature, to discover the unknown. Possibly one or other of my female acquaintances might have interested me more deeply before now, had they understood the art of masking, and thereby of awakening my curiosity. To-day, the sun is permitted full play upon your features, and you can consequently have no cause for avoiding me as if I were some kind of criminal. I should like indeed to know what you'll do in your future position with these fine company manners."

She had stood quite still, listening, and however angry she might feel, was unable to repress a smile at this.

“Leave that to me—good manners don’t do even a servant any harm—my future position?” She shrugged her shoulders and looked up at him quietly. “I fancy every body makes their own path in life ; to a certain extent, it comes from within and not merely as fate directs it. That doesn’t rob me of my courage. I am young and strong, and, as far as I myself am concerned, fully prepared for the moment when”—and she pointed across the hedge to the door in the wall—“when we must wander forth, staff in hand.”

“To settle at the forestry, and enter on the duties of its mistress,” he added, privately clenching his fist at the mere remembrance of that insufferable green-coat. Possibly he might have gone so far as to give expression to this remark, had not the conversation been interrupted by a sudden uproar in the yard. The dog was barking like mad, the pigeons were fluttering affrightedly over the roof, and the deep, strong voice of a man kept calling out, “Holloa, child,” angrily ; “where can she be ?”

The girl had already flown to the wicket gate and opened it.

“Oh, that was it, you were fetching something for your cookery. Listen, child, there’s been some strolling beggar wandering about outside the gate for the last five minutes—the fellow worries me with that beard of his—cut him a slice of bread and give him these few pence ; that’s all can be had at the Farm now-a-days ; tell him so, that he may be off.”

Meantime, Herr Markus had also reached the wicket gate, but had stood a moment behind the raspberry bushes hesitating. He could see the fallen-in front of the dwelling house from there, and its dim, lustreless window-panes. How hopeless and desperate must have been the collapse of the Franz’s fortunes, when such a wretched habitation could be regarded in the light of a haven, and contested for at the present moment in sheer despair, as a last resource.

A tall spare old man was standing at the hall door. He had a long pipe in one hand, and was leaning on a stick with the other. He had a strongly marked fine profile, and as a young man must have been remarkably

handsome. The skin was yellow and wrinkled now, and the dark eyes burned like dying embers in the deep sockets. That could be none other than the far-famed gambler and drinker, the destroying effect of inward passion was indelibly stamped on every feature.

He remained standing at the door while the girl went to cut some bread for the poor man. Now and again he would take a puff at his pipe, and send up clouds of smoke into the balmy morning air, while he still kept an eye out for the vagrant, who appeared to have escaped the old gentleman's criticism for the nonce at least. Some inkling of the fact began to dawn upon Herr Markus, and he too sought to catch a glimpse of this suspicious character. The hall door, which stood right opposite the yard gate, was only half open, and from where he stood Herr Markus could distinctly see a man stooping down behind the closed side, and with his face pressed close against the planks gaze intently into the yard through one of the chinks. Herr Markus recognised the miserable ragged coat, the battered hat, and the well worn light trousers; he had seen them only yesterday, and when the girl came

out of the house carrying a piece of bread in her hand the face became visible also; the same young face with the rich auburn beard and the sickly hue, which he himself had helped to lay upon the pillow in the guest chamber only the evening before.

The unfortunate man looked even more pitiful now, he seemed scarcely able to stand. His escape through the window must have been a gigantic feat for him, and it seemed simply ridiculous, in the face of weakness and prostration such as that, to talk of the runaway having first ransacked the house like a thief, and carried off the medallion from a remote chamber. It was strange, but this starveling made the same touching impression on everybody who came across him. The girl had crossed the yard rapidly, and gone outside in search of him, but no sooner did she catch sight of him, than she started back, the bread flew out of her hand across the road, and "the Prude," actually stretched out both her beautiful arms involuntarily to support those tottering steps, just as Louisa, the pretty little Sister-of-mercy, had done the day before.

Herr Markus now began to worry himself about this "stranger fellow," who knew how to make himself so interesting in maiden's eyes almost as much as about the green coat and his mock humility. Suddenly, however, the pair vanished, they had disappeared behind the wall, but he could distinctly hear the Amtmann's stick upon the stone floor as he wearily made his way back to the room.

There, nobody appeared to come to his aid, his poor wife could not, she was lying, ill, and the fine lady governess, oh, she was probably either composing or painting flowers, or absorbed perchance in some interesting book.

Herr Markus hurried out of his leafy hiding-place and crossed the yard to the house.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE Amtmann was in the very act of opening the sitting room door, when he heard footsteps behind him. He was a good deal stooped, and found some difficulty in raising himself and looking round, for his head had grown stiff on his shoulders. "Holloa, what was that?" he called aloud in an angry, acrid tone. "Is the fellow going to follow me into my own four walls?"

Just at that moment Herr Markus came up with him, and suppressing a half smile, introduced himself by name.

The old man immediately pulled himself together and drew himself up to his full height, he looked as if a galvanic stream had suddenly vivified his fragile frame—the dignity and gentlemanly tone of his salutation was in no-wise detracted from by the many darns that covered the dressing-gown he was wrapped in.

His tobacco pipe was flung into the nearest

corner, and while hurriedly waving his hand about, to disperse the anything but aristocratic fumes that saluted the visitor's olfactory nerves, he remarked, with easy nonchalance, he was obliged to smoke the weakest kind that could be found—the doctors were absolute tyrants, and troubled their heads but little whether or not a person were able to bear such common stuff.

Thereupon he threw open the room door with as much solemnity, as though they were about to enter some state chamber or hallowed spot. And hallowed it was, in so far as it had been the scene of suffering and endurance on the part of the poor thing whose bed stood in a recess against the inner wall of this lowly chamber for more than a year. There, hung the self-same curtains the maid had ironed out the evening before, by the help of the cones from The Forestry. They were white as snowflakes and beautifully draped round the bed : sheets, pillows and bolsters were all covered with the finest white linen, such as would not have disgraced the bed-chamber of the finest lady in the land.

A small round table stood close to the bed-

side ; prettily bound books with gilt leaves lay on the mahogany slab, and a bouquet of wild flowers, tastefully arranged, stood in a glass vase . . . well, certainly this invalid was scarcely subjected to the depths of poverty and misery he had fancied. The Bible Sisters tended her couch. The strong one, she with the will, whom he had met for the first time with the net upon her arm, she looked after the food and drink and bodily comfort, whilst the other surrounded her with pretty attentions from her own delicate hands. Very possibly she condescended so far as to sit beside the sick bed, with beautifully arranged hair, perfumed, and in elegant attire, and to read aloud some poetical selections out of the miniature volumes, thus diffusing faint reminiscences of her former refined life throughout even this lowly chamber.

“Our new neighbour, Herr Markus ; dear heart,” said the Amtmann, presenting the gentleman, and at the same time moderating his strong bass to a soft and gentle tone.

A small head with a wan old face started up in evident alarm at these words : “Oh, Sir,” whispered the old lady in feeble, querulous

tones, as she stretched out her small hand which was shaking with nervous anxiety. It was only too apparent that here also his presence excited the fear that the long dreaded moment had come at last.

Herr Markus approached the bed and pressed the proffered hand respectfully to his lips.

“I hope you’ll receive your new neighbour kindly, Madam,” he said: “he intends to be a *real* neighbour to you.” The poor invalid raised her large and still beautiful eyes to his as though she had not heard correctly. But the honest, handsome, manly face, with the kindly smile upon the lips looked little like deceit or mere speech making; made to-day to be forgotten to-morrow. In this happy conviction she breathed freely once again, and seizing the young man’s other hand pressed it in her own. “How kind of you to think of visiting the poor people”——she stopped, hesitated, and looked timidly across at her husband, who was suddenly seized with a violent fit of coughing——“how kind to visit Amtmanns at The Farm,” she added, hastily correcting herself.

“Yes, and just think what happened Saunchen,” said the Amtmann laughing. “Fancying that vagrant had the audacity to try and follow me into the house, I went on arguing with the fellow, as I thought, while, all the time Herr Markus was standing behind me.”

He sank into an old, creaking arm chair opposite the visitor, who, on an invitation from the invalid, had taken a seat near the bed. “I never used to think of such a thing as thieves when we lived at Gelsungen, the Prince’s demesne, which I rented for many a year,” he said, rubbing his knee, with a grimace. “There we lived on the first floor, and the house swarmed with servants. Here, of course, things are different, we have but few people about us, and such low windows are no joke. Over there, in the dining room, they might steal the silver spoons by dozens and nobody ever be the wiser, until they came to be counted, or perhaps, at some future time an inventory be taken.”

Herr Markus nearly bit his lip through in the effort to suppress a smile, as he thought of the girl’s energetic defence the day before of

the last remaining silver spoons which her "true as steel" comrade had been so anxious to dispose of; and the poor sick woman kept her eyes fixed on her folded hands, while a flush overspread her pale cheek.

"I don't think you have anything of that kind to fear from the man outside your gate," said Herr Markus, and he related his meeting with the stranger on the road-side, and how he had been harboured for the night at the Manor, but he did not conceal the unhappy man's flight, which was caused simply by pride and self-respect.

"I thought he looked, if possible, worse to-day than yesterday," he added. "I saw your maid, who took him a piece of bread, rush to his assistance——"

"Our maid?" said the old lady, raising her head from the pillow.

"Yes, Saunchen, the maid," said the old man, in an unwontedly loud tone, which cut short any further attempt at speech on his wife's part.

"I gave her a few pence for him too. Well, I'm really sorry to hear all that," he said with genuine pity, running his hands through his

thin, grey hair. "I should like to be able to help the poor fellow too, and if he needs food and rest for a few days, he shall certainly not be turned away from the Farm—hunting away the poor was never the fashion at Amtmann Franz's—I'll fetch the poor devil in."

He was about to rise, but Herr Markus was beforehand with him. "Allow me to go, sir," he said.

"But dear," put in the gentle voice from the bed, anxiously, "I don't know what we've got for dinner to-day, and remember, dear husband, he would require a bed, a good bed."

"Of course, I don't know what you are talking about, Saunchen; haven't we such a thing as that? Not a good bed at Amtmann's, where people were only too charmed to sleep in such soft down! Don't worry yourself, dear heart, about the housekeeping, you take a distorted view of everything since you were unable to look after matters yourself. But things are all right, my good little wife, you may rest assured of that. If we are fain to dispense with outward show, we can still boast the solidity of a good house. It is true," and he rumbled up his scanty locks once more,

“It is true, I can't manage the wine just now, I cannot hope to vie with the good folks at the Manor, in that respect. This cursed rheumatism has been at me again, and with my lame leg, it's an impossibility for me to go down to the cellar, and, on principle, I allow no other hand than my own about my wine.”

“Allow me then, meanwhile, to place a hamper of your departed friend's wine at your service,” said Herr Markus, his hand on the lock and he impatiently standing on the threshold. “The gnädige Frau must be deprived of a very necessary refreshment on that account, and will not, I am sure, reject this trifle, as a last gift from the hand of her early friend.”

He left the room and strode across the yard at a rapid pace. To his intense annoyance the whole time he had been sitting by that bedside, one scene kept perpetually recurring to him. When the prude was in the garden, she had pulled down her long linen sleeves over her bare arms, as if a man's eye resting on them were contamination; and two minutes afterwards she was ready to fling these same arms coolly round a young beggar. This scene kept so continually recurring to him and



annoyed him so much, that he was doubly anxious to embrace the opportunity of taking all the responsibility on his own shoulders.

But there was not a human being to be seen outside the gate, far or near. The stranger must, in the end, have struggled on with his few pence in his hand, and the girl, of course, had returned to her household duties. Involuntarily, he felt relieved and cheered by this discovery. How absurd! What was it to him if young blood, a boy and girl of the people, chose to assist one another in a strange place.

As he returned to the house, his eye scanned it narrowly. Miss Governess, of course, was avoiding him, and indeed he could scarcely wonder at that, seeing he had declared his own intention of keeping out of her way as much as possible. He felt woefully disinclined for seeing her at all, but this was a feeling he must overcome, as he must needs find out, by personal intercourse, what kind of mind she had.

Perchance he might catch a glimpse of her profile, or the outline of her figure at the window. There were three at most, worthy

the honour of framing a young lady's face ; that was the one to the left of the hall-door, with pretty white curtains. To the right, was another, with protruding blinds ; one could see into this room, which was nearly empty, and contained nothing but a stove, a table, and a few chairs made of pine wood. That very likely was the servant's room ; the maid's asylum any time she had a spare moment from her work, or could it be the famous dining-room, with its wealth of silver spoons ? Something white fluttering about just under the roof, suddenly caught his eye. A muslin curtain had got loose in an attic over the hall-door, and was blowing about in the wind ; lovely roses were blooming on the window sill and pictures were hanging in a recess on the wall, which were quite visible. Ah, there, then was Miss Governess's retreat. Well, she might bide in her seclusion for to-day ; he was in no mood just then for speechifying as fashion demanded in the circle Miss Bluestocking had frequented.

Herr Markus returned to the hall, across the path, strewn with fine white sand. The kitchen was open and afforded a view into the

room which was flagged, and the windows of which looked towards the fir-plantation. Frau Griebel's irreproachable kitchen could not have borne comparison with this one, where the remnants of tins and coppers rescued from the wreck of the Gelsungen establishment, shone with cleanliness, and the wooden vessels were ranged spic and span against the wall. The Frau Amtmann was probably not far wrong in her conclusions as to the dinner ; a saucepan of homœopathic-like dimensions containing soup, was simmering on the fire, and two miserable, recently sacrificed pigeons awaited the hand that should put them in the pan to be cooked, but this hand came not. It was so still in the kitchen, that the feeble bumping of a dumble-dore against the window-panes, was distinctly audible. Well, it was not unnatural that that leal-hearted maid who was "one heart and one soul" with her mistress, should avoid the unwelcome visitor as studiously as the angry inhabitant of the attic chamber.

On his return he noticed traces of tears on the gentle face lying so patiently behind the bed-curtains ; but the Amtmann was busy

arranging two or three Havannas on a cigar-stand—the remnant no doubt of those on account of which the ranger was to pay a visit to the Jew, with the lace in his pocket.

“Well,” he said, “what has become of Mr. Longbeard?”

Herr Markus replied that the young man must have gone on his way, and at once resumed his seat by the invalid’s bed.

“Didn’t *she* know where he was gone?” enquired the Amtmann, apparently engrossed in arranging the cigars, for he never looked up.

“Oh, you mean the maid? I did not see her.”

“No? Busy with the dinner, I suppose.” And he offered Herr Markus a cigar which was civilly declined.

The young man saw the old lady wiping away a tear every now and then, surreptitiously. Perhaps she knew about this affair of the lace. Very likely it was an heirloom, the only relic of that once vast inheritance the vicious old Amtmann had squandered. A sense of indignant scorn for this irreclaimable old man overpowered him, and not for

worlds would he have touched one of his cigars.

“A lovely bouquet,” he remarked, pointing to the glass vase, with the kind object of turning the poor lady’s thoughts away from this unrefreshing subject.

“You may well say so,” replied the Amtmann. “It was an artist’s hand arranged it. My niece, who is staying with us just now, is unrivalled in flower painting. The child is a great pleasure to us, and the capital I expended on her education is well repaid, not like many a good crown I have thrown away on so-called geniuses.”

“Ah,” broke in the invalid, with a faint smile, as she glanced at the old man with unchanged affection, “my dear husband always fancied it incumbent on him to help everybody who lived by Art, but he carried his benevolence too far.”

“Youthful follies, Saunchen, stupid nonsense, and yet, God knows, I should do the same thing over again to-day if—if I were swimming with the stream. Ah! that swimming, how delightful it would be, aye, delightful, despite the stiff joints that infernal

hole, the Hirschwinkel, has given me. Well, it's a long lane that has no turning, and when my Californian boy returns —— ”

A smothered cry from the bed interrupted him, and the old lady buried her face in the pillows. “But what was this I was going to say,” he continued, rubbing his chin in some embarrassment. “Oh, I know. My brother died one fine day—he had been a widower from the time he was thirty—and he left me the charge of Agnes, poor little thing. He was not a fortunate man, and as the little orphan's guardian I had no trouble whatever about his property—there was nothing at all left—so Saunchen and I took the little maid to our hearts, just as if the stork had brought her to us clean and clear out of the pond, and we never repented it. On the fatal day that saw my dear wife break down completely under her nervous sufferings, we learned to know the treasure we possessed in Agnes; she left her grand situation in Frankfurt in the lurch, and came off to this wilderness to nurse her aunt.”

“Agnes is an angel—she sacrifices herself for our sakes,” said the old lady with such

eagerness and energy, one would think she feared to lose a moment in setting the girl's character in its true light. "She has taken a yoke upon herself ——"

"There, there, my heart, it's not quite so bad as all that;" interposed Amtmann, with an uneasy air. He bent forward and looked over at the work-table which stood in the window. "H'm—hat and gloves gone. Away again in the woods, most likely, hunting for wild flowers. I should like to have had the pleasure of introducing you to her; she can't have all the splendours of General Von Guseck's house with us, but ——"

"The young lady was probably a good deal spoilt in her position?" said Herr Markus, with a malicious smile.

"As much spoilt as if she'd been a daughter of the house," replied the old man. "Theatres, balls, parties, her own maid to attend on her, drives in elegant equipages, &c." And he counted them all on his fingers. "She is very pretty, very *comme il faut*, and plays the piano to perfection. Good heavens, how the thought of that keeps worrying me," he broke off. "I had an instrument in Getsungen, a

grand piano, which cost me thousands of crowns. Many a famous virtuoso played upon it at my parties, and now, a wealthy starch-boiler has it, and half a dozen or so young hopefuls of the starch-boiling breed, thump away upon it daily. But what was I to do? Tell me yourself. Where could such an instrument have stood here? Still, I wish you could have heard that volume of tone, just for once, under my niece's fingers, it was absolutely overpowering—but you don't care about pianoforte playing?" he said, noticing the expression legibly written on Herr Markus's face.

"No," was the curt reply. "The number of pianoforte playing damsels is legion: every dinner, every evening party winds up with martyrizing the unhappy keys. I always seize my hat the moment I see a lady sitting down to the piano."

The Amtmann gave a constrained laugh, and his wife said, very gravely :

"Rest assured, did we still possess the instrument, you would never have any performance on it forced on you. Our dear child does not consider any mere accomplishment a real occupation, her life's work ——"



“Dear heart, have I not just said that Agnes is a first-rate painter,” said the Amtmann impatiently.

“She is just as much at home in the kitchen and in the pantry,” she continued, though with an evident effort since her husband’s dictatorial interruption, but she persevered, nevertheless, speaking somewhat louder and with marked emphasis.

“I do not understand you, Saunchen,” he broke in a second time, while he rubbed his knee angrily, with another grimace. “What makes you so anxious to depict Agnes, the daughter of an officer of rank, a Franz, as a Cinderella, a kitchen wench? I should regret my money if that was all she could do: *à propos*, Herr Markus,” he said, resolutely turning the subject, “how long do you think of staying at the Hirschwinkel?”

“Not more than a few days.”

The old gentleman seemed much relieved, but still repeated in a tone of apparent disappointment: “A few days? then we’re scarcely likely to have the pleasure of seeing you here again, and owing to the unfortunate state of my limbs, which will prevent my returning

your visit, I feel constrained to beg for an answer to my letter, in person—to cut the matter short, what about the railway question? You have now seen with your own eyes the wretched state of the farm offices, they are long past mending. Then, this old barn we live in, groans and creaks in every joint at the slightest puff of wind; it will fall in at the first rush by of the engine, as sure as two and two make four.”

“Then the best plan would be to pull them down beforehand.”

“Sir,” burst out the Amtmann and he looked almost ready to fly at the speaker’s throat, while the poor invalid held up her hands with a cry of terror: “Sir, that is as much as to say you intend to turn me out of doors”—

Herr Markus took the old lady’s hand tenderly:

“How can you be so much alarmed, gnädige Frau?” he said. “Is this house, which is all too plainly on the eve of collapsing, so dear to you, that you could not bear to see another in its stead? I am going to rebuild the Mill from its very foundations, indeed, I have no

other alternative, unless I mean to see my tenant buried under its ruins some fine day, and a similar undertaking would be much easier to carry out here, than near the water. I promise you the house shall be a pretty and comfortable one, with bright, healthful rooms, verandah and safety shutters. We'll build it at least thirty feet further from the objectionable line, remove the offices to the north side, and the yard to the back, for which purpose, of course, a considerable portion of the plantation must be cut down. It is only right that I should provide you with a proper abode, while the building process is going on, and I propose you should pitch your tent, for the time being, at the Manor. I will place half the upper étage at your service, and I fancy you will feel quite at home in your dear old friend's rooms, and be able to get on in them till the end of next May, when I trust you will be able to return without fail to the Farm. Do you agree to this?"

Speechless and weeping with emotion, she essayed to answer him and to raise the hand she still held in her's to her lips, but the young man resisted in horror.

“No, no,” he said, colouring with embarrassment, “pray don’t thank me. Accept what I am doing as a sort of farewell message from the noble departed on the other shore.”

Even the Amtmann was reduced to temporary silence, he evidently felt tempted to press the young man’s hand in gratitude, but at the last words he pricked up his ears and listened. He drew back his hand, and it needed no great wit to perceive that a light had suddenly dawned upon him, and the suspicion occurred that there was “something lying hidden” beneath this marvellous generosity. His was one of those self-sufficient natures, who never admit that they have been the authors of their own ruin ; give them only the faintest inkling, and they ride off at once on the wings of fancy.

“True,” he remarked with cool composure and dignified reserve of manner, “she knew how to value our constant attention very well. Even when separated by distance, we always shared her joys and sorrows loyally, and, at last, consented to share even the dreary solitude of the Hirschwinkel with her. Many a time have I braved wind and weather to be-

guile the tedium of a winter's evening with a game of chess—not that I have any great love of chess, you must know, sir, quite the contrary, but one doesn't grudge a sacrifice of that kind to a woman who knew as she did how to value such devoted friendship."

"She did more for us than all our friends put together, who so often sat round our board and hearth," said the poor invalid in a trembling voice.

"Don't be bitter, dear heart, I don't allow one of them near us now. But you are right—Clothilde was truly grateful, and would have done much more for us, had not we from motives of delicacy refused it." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well, it was to be; death took her unawares, otherwise things might have been very different indeed."

Herr Markus turned away indignantly from this pretentious babbler, who, in hardly disguised terms, was telling him to his face that but for his ill-luck he might now have been master of the Hirschwinkel.

A sharp reply rose to the young man's lips, but a glance at the agitated invalid who with

piteous anxiety looked into his face, checked the retort, and he replied quietly,

“So far as I can gather from her legal adviser, who has known her for years, my aunt never regarded herself in any other light than that of trustee to the property left by her husband; that, too is supposed to be the reason why she made no will.”

“Very likely you are right——” stammered out the Amtmann, sinking back dejectedly into his old arm-chair. “I remember hearing something of the kind from her own lips. It is all the kinder of you to take our life-long friendship into account. Well, I accept your offer of sheltering us at the Manor, with many thanks, but what, may I ask, is to become of my cattle in the meantime?”

It was difficult to maintain one's gravity in the face of such ridiculous ostentation.

“Well,” replied Herr Markus, busied with the button of his glove, “as I was passing by just now, I think I saw a cow in the stable.”

“Quite right, Herr Markus. Just at present there are no more. Only a short time ago, I was obliged to sacrifice two splendid Swiss cows to the butcher; a great trial to a farmer

like me. I am altogether unlucky that way, my good sir. Things are not as they ought to be outside. Nobody knows that better than I do, but I am in want of a man. I have written about one in every direction. I *won't* take one belonging to this place, they're not worth salt to their meat—and I have offered them any wages, but the ragamuffins all find it too lonely here, not one will venture to the Hirschwinkel."

"Allow me to try my luck," replied Herr Markus. "Perhaps I may prove more fortunate. We can bring the cow over to the Manor, and the poultry can be fed in the yard there, at the same time. On completion of the new building, things must be got again into their former train. I mean, the stalls must be filled with cattle, and a proper staff of men be provided for the careful tilling of the farm—unless, indeed, it is to go to utter ruin. I will see to all that, especially about finding a labourer, on account of the harvest. Of course," and the button of the glove grew still more troublesome, "of course, we want another maid too, a real thorough-bred country girl, who will work with a will. I presume

that the maid who works at present on the farm was not engaged for that purpose originally?"

The invalid raised her thin white hand to her eyes, as if overcome by a momentary weakness, and the Amtmann was seized with such a violent fit of coughing that he grew black in the face.

But Herr Markus was burning to learn something more about this maid, and stuck fast by this favourable opportunity, despite the weakness and cough of the aged pair.

"I am told she is town-bred," he continued obstinately, "or at all events that her last situation was in some large town?"

"Yes, she was at Frankfurt am Main," replied the old lady. Her hand had sunk again upon the quilt, and was plucking at it. "She was not brought up for such a position, far from it, dear sir ——"

"We should be doubly grateful to you," broke in the Amtmann in a loud voice, "if you could provide us with a proper active country girl. When do you think of commencing the building, Herr Markus?"

"I will communicate at once with a builder



in the nearest town," he replied, rising—an angry frown knit his brow—"and I shall lay the designs before you in another day or two."

"God bless you. You are a noble man," said the invalid with deep emotion, as he took leave of her with a respectful obeisance.

The Amtmann insisted on seeing him to the door. In the hall he stopped and held him fast with a mysterious air.

"It is most kind and liberal of you to do all this for us," he said in a low voice, "and I am most grateful to you, but don't imagine that you are risking anything—it will be repaid, every farthing of it; you won't lose your money, I promise you. You see, I couldn't say anything in there because my wife still cries her eyes out about our boy, silly little woman. She wouldn't care if he came home in rags and tatters if only she had him once more—that's the way with women, but in matters of that kind the man must keep the upper hand. I won't spoil my son's career by re-calling him too soon, just to gratify such idle whims. The ne'er do weel who found our lovely forest all too confined for him has had monstrous luck, the young

rascal is a species of Nabob already ; another year or two and I'll ask his Serenity straight away the price of his Gelsungen demesne ——  
"Halloa, you beast, begone," he said, taking off his cap and flinging it at a cat who had got into the kitchen through the open door, and was in the act of carrying off one of the pigeons.

He hobbled in, hunted away the animal with his stick, and locked the kitchen door. It was empty. The soup had ceased to boil, the fire had long since died out.

"What new folly is this," grumbled the Amtmann, crimson with rage and annoyance. "No matter how many servants a person has, they're all alike, leaving doors and windows open that cats may feed on what one pays good money for—we were within a hair's breadth of losing our dinner—such insanity ! Where can she be ?"

Yes, indeed, where can she be ? was Herr Markus's own remark to himself, as, having taken leave of the Amtmann, he passed again through the yard into the garden to reach the road by which he had come to the Farm. He cast an angry glance at the attic chamber, where the muslin curtain was still fluttering

about like a light cloud in the sky. More than probable she had taken refuge with Miss Governess, and that two heads were at that moment laid together, laughing maliciously and unperceived at his expense—that was going a little too far, to sacrifice the family's meagre repast, and draw down a scolding on herself, simply for the purpose of keeping out of his way.

It was no less still and solitary in the garden. The midges were swarming round the bushes, through which, only half-an-hour before, the supposed young lady had come out to cut herbs. A few, that had fallen from her hand in her rapid flight, still lay scattered about—evidently no one had been there since. There was no reason either why Herr Markus should not look through the manuscript-book. There was no eye to mark his ironical smile.

The first pages of the little book were written in the same delicate hand that had penned the Amtmann's letter. There were no verses, nothing but fragmentary thoughts jotted down, just as they had occurred : views and opinions of a well-ordered mind—these pages actually bore favourable testimony to

the writer's character. Just in the way she had at once resigned her pleasant situation to turn sick nurse, so had she unhesitatingly exchanged these which were not absolutely necessary for the well-kept but meagre accounts of her uncle's reduced household. But how reconcile this prompt mode of action with the same young lady, who still permitted herself the attendance of a lady's maid, now as then, just like a Princess. He crushed the innocent book in his hand, but he really had cause for annoyance. What a hornet's nest he had brought about his ears. He, whose existence had hitherto been like one long summer's day, who at home was wont to fulfil his office duties with energy and punctuality, looking forward to the relaxation of pleasant society afterwards; whom nothing had ever robbed of balmy sleep or healthy appetite; here he was, the charm of his woodland retreat utterly destroyed by harassing thoughts, impossible to get rid of; Frau Griebel's delicacies were left untasted, and only that morning he had been tossing restlessly upon his pillow before ever "the cock's shrill clarion" pierced the wall of the curtained chamber.

This Farm, this rack-rent Castle, with its mystical governess, its half-crazed old bragger, the Amtmann ; the maid with the sphinx-like face and the beauteous form in the beggarly dress, who worried and wearied him as no human being had ever done before ; and then that insufferable fellow, the keeper, who was set on entrapping her with his humanitarian ways—bah, he wished them one and all at Jericho, because of the fever that was consuming him, and which, do what he would, he could not shake off.

He was going to town that day to meet a builder who was undertaking the re-building of the mill, and the plan for the new farm house could be completed easily enough in the next few days, as well as the contract for its completion. Everything else he might safely leave in farmer Griebel's hands and those of his trusty wife. Such as the hiring of servants, the temporary removal of the Amtmann's family to the manor; the purchase, latter on, of cattle—these arrangements would occupy but a few days longer ; then he would shake the dust off his feet, and it would be a year and a day before he again visited the Hirschwinkel. Meantime,

the will in the note book continued his secret, until he had recovered his self-possession, and in process of time decided into whose care he would entrust the future welfare of the sick lady at the farm.

He flung the book down on the table and strode out of the garden, the rickety old gate closed behind him with a faint creak; he fancied this low, indistinct sound for ever closed that chapter of his life. Nothing would have persuaded him that the fault was all his own, if the web of other lives had become so interwoven with his, that nothing could again disentangle them; even as the briars which thronged his pathway and clung tenaciously to his feet were only to be got rid of by trampling them underfoot.

## CHAPTER IX

TWO days had elapsed. The builder had visited the Hirschwinkel the day before, had expressed himself master of Herr Markus's views and promised to forward the work as much as possible. Herr Markus had accompanied him in his inspection of the Farm—of course he did not cross the threshold; his resolution was too strong for that, but he could not hinder the Amtmann coming to the window to thank him, with great effusion for the hamper of wine he had despatched immediately on his return to the Hirschwinkel; neither could he refuse the proposal of a visit from the Amtmann—the old gentleman had absolutely arrived a few hours later, in the twilight.

Herr Markus was sitting in the pavilion when he saw two figures appear on the outskirts of the wood—one, that of a man leaning heavily on his walking stick and hobbling along with no small difficulty, the other a woman, on

whose arm the old man was leaning—by the bye, Frau Griebel had told him that Miss Governess was just such a maypole as her maid—and there she was *in propria personâ*, a tall slender young lady in a well fitting, dark dress, falling in soft folds around her; a grey veil floated about the little straw hat, and covered her face like a dusty cobweb.

But the ridiculous part of it all was, that no sooner did Herr Markus appear on the steps than this irritated young lady whispered something in her uncle's ear, withdrew into the wood and vanished like a phantom—the old gentleman had propped himself up on his stick as well as he could, stared in amazement after the runaway, and uttered a volley of oaths till Herr Markus came to his relief, and leaning on his arm he had been able to vent his anger on the absurd prudery of the young women of the present day.

It was no light task to get him up the steps, but once there, he had ensconced himself very comfortably on the luxurious sofa cushions, and looked round the young bachelor's rooms with no small delight. Cigars and a couple of bottles of sparkling green Römer



were immediately placed on the table, and they inhaled the delicious perfume of this choice Rhine wine as a preliminary to its enjoyment. Herr Markus lighted the new hanging lamp in the little pavilion, and its bright light at once betrayed the cause of that "twilight visit"—the coat that hung on the old man's emaciated shoulders not unlike a clothes-horse, was thread-bare and darned in several places with scrupulous care; but his linen was faultlessly white and clean, and an imitation stone in an old-fashioned setting, glittered as a breast pin in his shirt front, one thing Herr Markus could not deny—that he had spent a most agreeable hour. The old man had conversed delightfully on every topic; had shown some knowledge of science, and confirmed the universal dictum that himself, a worthless spendthrift, he was capable of giving the best and soundest advice to other people, on every subject, and on every occasion—strange paradox!

Herr Markus had seen his guest home himself—that too had been unavoidable, for the semi-paralysed man could not possibly have returned home alone, and nobody had come to

fetch him. Herr Markus's sharp ear had caught a suspicious rustling amongst the trees along the pathway, but—whether it was Miss Governess who so insultingly avoided him, or that detestable prude—he ignored them both equally, and remarked in a loud tone to the somewhat deaf old Amtmann, that there must be game straying about in the wood, for he could hear something moving. Thus they proceeded, the old man leaning his entire weight on Herr Markus's left arm, while in the other he carried a packet of books, which the Amtmann had taken from the shelf, with the remark that he was longing for some good reading. From want of space, he said, he had been compelled to sell his valuable library, which contained thousands of volumes, for a mere song. Herr Markus had not been long in coming to an understanding with Peter Griebel. The good fellow had declared himself ready to assist his master, heart and soul, in his Samaritan task, and his sturdy better-half had given in with the remark, that if her Peter wished it, it must be done. "Smooth water runs deep," and behind that quiet air of his lay a deal of cunning, so all she said was, in

God's name, yea and amen. Still there was nothing to prevent her shaking her head and casting up her eyes at the young master's doings ; he must be too well off or he'd never walk so gaily on the ice. It might be easy enough to live with the Frau Amtmann, and even with the fine lady governess ; she would think nothing of lifting or carrying the old lady about, or even of watching beside her at night ; all that she would do very gladly, and as for the governess's haughty airs and graces, one could pretend not to see them. But with the Amtmann, that lazy loon, that glutton, that self-sufficient creature, with him it must be war to the knife ; it was just as well to say so at once. She knew that were she to feed his cow on bread and butter, and his poultry on cakes, he would still have something to nag at. And that maid in her tattered town gown and town manners didn't suit the place either, where work was always done in coarse, common petticoats, and without any winkers, that eccentric creature only set the other servants by the ears ; in a word, she could not endure her. Herr Markus was

destined to learn that very day how accident was to intensify this dislike.

He received a bulky packet from his book-keeper, which demanded an immediate reply, on several important subjects. He had consequently been hours writing and working with such intensity that he had forgotten everything going on round him. None of the farmer's family had appeared as yet, that day. He had taken his dinner (which had been brought up by a maid-servant) alone, and as soon as she had cleared away, the scratching of his pen had been the only sound to break the stillness of the gable room. All at once the door was thrown open and Frau Griebel entered, bearing as usual, the afternoon coffee herself.

"It's true, our old manor house is a sweet, cool spot," she remarked, after Herr Markus had shaken hands with her, without rising from his chair. "It's sultry outside, Herr Markus, just like an oven," and she wiped her face and neck with the corner of her apron. "I've been mushroom hunting with my Louisa this morning, and we enjoyed a basket of strawberries together too. We were up and on the road by four o'clock; it's a long journey, but

here we have no mushrooms, and in the Grafenholz the ground is covered with them—some, half as large again as my fist—only for that indeed, horses wouldn't drag me to the Grafenholz. I can't endure the Ranger there; he's another of your high and mighty folk like them at the farm. And now, I may as well tell you that I won't live under the same roof with the strange maid at Amtmann's—it's out of the question, even if it was only on my Louisa's account, when she's at home for the holidays. I saw something wonderful to-day. What do you think—but that girl actually met us early this morning, about half-past four, coming out of the Ranger's house—but, dear me, what a colour you are! But it's no wonder; the way women carry on now-a-days is enough to make a man blush." She placed the cup near him on the table. "So now you know the scandal, and can't be surprised if the Griebel, for once, puts up her back. If the Amtmann *must* have a maid, I'll see to finding a good one, but I won't let the present one into my house. Honesty and respectability have always been the Griebel's pride. And now don't let your coffee grow cold, and

don't write yourself ill—your head's like a coal."

Scarcely had the door closed behind her, before Herr Markus sprung to his feet, as if bursting fetters that forcibly detained him. Worthy Frau Griebel was a gossip just like all old women, and it had been as much as he could do to refrain from taking her by the shoulders and giving her a good shake. The calumniated girl was undeniably stand-off, and assumed airs above her station, which accounted for the jealousy she awakened, but her conduct was blameless, let her come out of the forestry, when and how she might. But a sort of nervous dread seized him every time he heard the girl's name coupled with that odious green-coat's. Suddenly a light burst in on him; he saw his good Samaritan work, as Peter Griebel called it, under a new aspect; he could, no doubt, affirm with a clear conscience, that from the first he had determined to turn his aunt's legacy to the best possible account for the benefit of the recipient, but his head-over-ears mode of action had not been due to the noblest motives, he had grudged this green-coat the halo his kindness shed

round him ; he wanted to have the foreway with him, and in so doing had effected the opposite of what he wished—his own arrangements had rendered the maid's self-sacrificing attention unnecessary, and there was nothing any longer to retard the wedding.

Frau Griebel was right, his head was on fire, the pulses in his temples hammering away. He paced the room incessantly, and all at once it seemed to dawn upon him what it was that ailed him. What? Was not the Oberforstmeister looking down with a contemptuous smile on the "Locksmith's son," in whom the workman's blood instinctively sought "like for like". Was it not pulsing too, for one who ate the bread of servitude, for a girl in a working dress, with toil worn hands? Yet might not the maiden of the dark brown locks, venture boldly to stand beside that fair one? Was she not equally beautiful, had she not the same sweet expression full of soul, which had fascinated him alike in the portrait and under that disguise which he had lifted with reckless hand?

Sultry though it might be outside, there were patches of meadow on which the blue

sky was shining, and long reaches of grass affording space to roam in—the low ceiling was suffocating him within those four walls. He seized his hat. The pen he had flung away, lay in a pool of ink on a half written sheet of paper, and several notes had been thrown down, in his hasty rise. He saw nothing of the disorder. The book-keeper at home might be in what need he pleased of instructions, the head of the great firm Markus, once the strictest and most conscientious man at his desk, rushed away utterly oblivious of every business interest.



## CHAPTER X.

WITHOUT any further delay he struck into a path leading to the plantation. All his newly-made resolutions, not to go near the Farm any more, were scattered to the winds, like the dust which the sultry evening breeze was blowing about in clouds over the arid land. He never hesitated either, having skirted the wall of the court to pause outside the closed gate and peer through the chinks in the door into the yard; in the same way that the beggar had done, whom a few days previously they had given a few pence to.

The scorching sun beamed fiercely down on the dazzling white pavement of the empty yard, which had not seen a drop of rain for days. The poultry had apparently withdrawn to some more shady corner out of the burning heat, and the dog, which, at the approach of footsteps, had made a feeble attempt at barking, gave it up as impossible in such heat. On the other hand, this warmth seemed grate-

ful to the old people who day and night seemed to freeze in the cold damp atmosphere of their miserable abode. Two windows were thrown wide open. Through one, Herr Markus could see the Amtmann sitting reading, and through the other, the invalid lying back quietly on her pillows with folded hands. The old people were quite alone ; there was not a creature moving about in the curtainless room to the right, and he vouchsafed but a very passing glance at the attic window, for he cared not a whit whether Miss Governess sat hidden behind her rose-bushes or not, he had but one thought—but one! and that induced him to make a circuit round to the back where he could inspect the kitchen window also. But there too, the same solitude reigned as in the garden, through which he passed on, and in all the fields belonging to the Farm over which he could obtain a bird's eye view, across the white-thorn hedge.

He gnawed his underlip savagely. Must he really visit the Grafenholz, only to realize that he was a fool ; to suffer the humiliation of finding himself defeated ? If they only knew that at home ? What a triumph for

those numerous friends, whom he had never ceased roasting about their "love affairs". What a shock to his step-mother, who was the daughter of a Privy-councillor ; what a subject for giggling at, on the part of that host of young ladies, on whom he had often enough played off the pranks of a free heart. All this he painted in the liveliest colours, but kept steadily pursuing, the while, the road through his own grounds with eager haste, and succeeded at last in reaching the corner, behind the great beech tree, from whence he could watch the keeper's house. He understood what a relief it must be to mind and body, to exchange even for a few hours, the sandy court-yard at the fir plantation, with that red house there. It looked so trim and dainty, its bright red hue contrasting gaily with the green turf on which it stood, where not a withered leaf or dried up blade of grass was ever allowed to harbour. Behind it, towered the tall straight mass of beech, like a forest-wall, from whence flowed life-giving streams, into the valley below.

Its aspect seemed to some extent changed that day ; the bird cages, with their noisy

inmates, had been removed from the upper window, and all those destined by the keeper for the invalid lady at the Farm were darkened by having the blinds let down. Deadly stillness pervaded the place, such carefully guarded silence that one could fancy the nervous old lady already ensconced within its walls. At all events the house was fast locked, not a creature was at home, so Herr Markus ere long quitted his post of observation intending to return home. At that moment a sudden burst of wild laughter made him pause—one long, continued, frantic peal, which jarred upon the ear, 'mid the solemn stillness of the wood, then followed the sound of voices, in a state of excitement and the curtains were blown about, as if disturbed by the commotion in the room—evidently the keeper had visitors who were enjoying themselves in this cool retreat. Herr Markus pictured that little home-like nook filled with tobacco smoke and the fumes of beer, while the mirth-exciting jest over the cards, was not forgotten.

No, he found it impossible to picture the girl in such company—she could not be here. No man would dare to indulge in such brutal

laughter beneath her proud gaze ; and yet, just then, the door opened and forth she came !

She was carrying an earthen pitcher and came down the steps with a dejected mien, her eyes cast down, her brows knit painfully together—the very picture of melancholy abstraction.

The watcher in his hiding-place had felt inclined, in his disgust, to rush out at her, but paused involuntarily, restrained by a kind of halo which seemed to emanate from that maiden form and hold in check his dark, unruly passion.

She went round by the corner of the house to the spring, which, framed in the most primitive fashion, poured its crystal waters into a trough.

Herr Markus followed the girl, and on hearing footsteps behind her, she turned round. He was already so near her that he could see her colour, but the knit of pain between the brows vanished at the same moment as if it had never been there.

“Do you wish for a drink?” she asked, placing the pitcher on a plank just under the

flowing stream. "I'll fetch a tumbler from the house——"

"The Bible says: 'And she made haste and let down the pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink'—he replied sarcastically, barring her path to the house—"But I don't wish to drink out of the pitcher either, thank you. Pure spring water!" he went on with a sneer; "do you really believe that yelling crew yonder are only enjoying that kind of simple beverage?"

She started, as he noticed, with grim satisfaction.

"Can the noise be heard outside?" she enquired anxiously.

"Does that surprise you? I should say the voices there were right lusty ones. I was in hopes the gentlemen were about to favour us now with a drinking song——"

"You are mistaken," she broke in, pale to her very lips—tears dimming the glance that rested timidly on him.

"Well, then, I am mistaken. Perhaps it is a party of devotionalists who have assembled there; it may be so." He shrugged his shoulders—"What is it to me? But one

thing I wish to ask you. Do your family know about this intercourse of yours at The Forestry?"

She raised her hands, as, it were, to ward some danger off. "No, no, the old people know nothing about it, and must not know anything either."

"Indeed, *is that* intended to put a seal on my lips too?" he answered, restraining himself with no small difficulty, yet with assumed indifference.

"I must, indeed, entreat you earnestly not to mention the subject, should you call again at the Farm, before you leave—I entreat you, sir?"

"Well, well, I won't, if so it must be. I know how to hold my tongue too, though I'm not in the habit of having anything to do with unclean secrets."

"Unclean?"

She moved away from him, and the question rose perforce in his mind, whether this girl who could express a whole world of feelings in one word, was simply a finished actress, or a soul of spotless purity and rare intelligence.

With keen anguish he decided it must be the former. Was there room for any doubt?

Was not the overdone prudery with which she had resented his one stolen glimpse at her hidden face, a piece of manifest acting, seeing she shunned not the company of those boisterous fellows? And now, she had actually been so bold as to sue for discretion on his part, in her soft, pathetic voice. Then the magic charm of her appearance; the animated face, and the wavy masses of her rich dark hair. He felt as if a beautiful serpent were coiling slowly round his heart, and that he must crush it, cost him what it might.

“Does that ugly word annoy you?” he demanded sharply. “Then let us substitute interesting; the ‘interesting secret’. You’ll have no difficulty in managing the old people, they never cross the door-step and can’t follow your traces, and as for me, I’ve given you my word, I’ll be as silent as the grave. But what about Lady Blue-stockings? She’s not chained to her attic, and her feet are pretty nimble, as I discovered yesterday evening: she can float like a fairy and vanish like a summer cloud drifting before the breeze; she might appear at any moment in that grey cobweb of a veil—what then?”



An almost imperceptible smile stole round her lips; she bent down at the spring and pushed the plank with the now overflowing pitcher out of reach of the spout.

"I think, I have already told you, that I am not in a position to do anything without her knowledge," she replied, busy with the water.

"Yes, you told me so," he answered. "And it is quite natural your young lady should sympathize with this kind of secret. Intrigue is the favourite pastime of such, and if debarred the amusement in higher circles, they must perforce content themselves with a lower sphere, out of pure love for the game itself. I know that underhand kind of mole-work in a family. I know all about it. Of course, they prefer working on their own account. They pretend to hear and see nothing, though, in reality, they're busy drinking in every family secret, great or small, with all their ears. Nobody knows how they manage it, but somehow they get their foot firmly planted on the first rung of the ladder, and climb up gradually step by step till they finally reach the top—these humble overlooked creatures—and usurp

the place of some betrayed lady-love, or daughter of a widowed father—the lady's-maid, the confidante of a governess, out of General von Guseck's house, must be tolerably familiar with these kind of stories."

The girl was still standing half turned towards the well. Once she raised her hands but let them fall again ; now she looked back, but not with that air of offended majesty, which he knew so well. Pained surprise and keen reproach alone spoke out of the dark brown eyes, as she slowly raised them and with difficulty said :

"General von Guseck was a widower, with one son and a daughter of seventeen, who was engaged to be married. They all, from the youngest in the family, looked up to the governess with confidence and respect, and I know that she never—no, never by the faintest thought of self-interest—betrayed the confidence reposed in her. Nobody knows that better than I do. I will put my hand in the fire in proof of it."

"Oh, that is all that is wanting," he replied with a hard laugh. "To thrust that poor hard-worked hand into the fire for the sake of that

egotism personified. Were you not dragged here into poverty and want only that this spoilt young lady might not miss your care and attendance? The old lady at The Farm told me herself that you were not bred to this hard labour in the fields, and yet you're obliged to submit to such tasks, because otherwise this idol of yours would scarcely have — anything to eat."

She shook her head energetically, and bit her under lip with her small white teeth. For a moment she seemed about to reply, and her eyes gleamed with suppressed drollery.

"Oh, give yourself no further trouble," he said, cutting her short. "It's labour lost. I know better. Once these young ladies have tasted the cup of pleasure, they are lost to simple home life; their one thought is, how to attain to this ecstatic life of luxury permanently, and to effect this, they pounce on some unfortunate rich man—be he grey-haired or morose from age, or young and simple—and compel him to marry them, whether he likes it or no. Very probably the people in General von Guseck's house knew all this, and were on their guard; for my part, I'd rather live alone

all my life than make any one who had ever been a governess the mistress of my house—far better the first, best peasant girl out of the woods, if only honesty be written on her face and truth in her heart.”

He noticed how every drop of blood forsook her cheeks, but she made no further reply. She took up her pitcher and was about to carry it away.

“And are you really going back there?” he said, pointing to the keeper’s house. “Has that wild shrieking really no terrors for you?”

She looked at him sideways, with downcast eyes.

“My nerves are strong, almost as strong as a peasant girl’s out of the woods, who thinks nothing of the Sunday brawls at a bar,” she replied, with great asperity. “In the present instance, there is no question as to whether I like it or not, I simply must submit ——”

“You mean by that, that you are already bound by ties of duty to that house,” he interposed ruefully. “But people may put their own construction on these duties, be they what they may, as they do of Miss Governess, who sits like the veiled prophet.” His voice

took a still sharper tone. "It may be very pleasant to mislead people, very amusing, and I don't grudge you the joke, in the least. The inmates of the Hirschwinkel, however, are not so accommodating as their new master. They solve the riddle differently, and find no excuse for Amtmann's maid going in and out of the keeper's house at all hours—the man lives alone ——"

He stopped. It pained even him to see her hand fall powerless from the pitcher and the hot blood mount to her brow and crimson her neck.

One moment she stood as if rivetted to the spot, her eyes turned away in shame, and for the first time he caught the outline of her profile, and the delicate lines of her throat standing out in complete repose, like a picture against the dark back ground of the beechen green.

A narrow velvet ribbon encircled her throat, like a thin line drawn by a pencil. Involuntarily Faust's words recurred to the young man :—

Wie sonderbar muss diesen schönen Hals—ein einzig rothes Snürchen smücken."

And the splendid valley became at once transformed into a gloomy defile. The keeper's house with its darkened blinds and wild doings, which the girl was so evidently trying to hide, all seemed suddenly converted to a place where crime might shelter and hide its head.

Here then was where she was wont to steal away secretly, drawn, as it were, by a magnet into the whirlpool; a maddening pain seized him at the thought that she might already have been engulfed in it—yet she was standing like one awakened from some frightful dream, horror-stricken; the evidence of some uncontrollable emotion written legibly upon her face. Perhaps this bitter moment might have the effect of chasing her for ever from the Grafenholz. He was hoping it might, and watching her intently with anxious suspense, when she suddenly looked up: a dogged resolution speaking in every feature.

“What do I care about such calumnies?” she said abruptly, her head thrown back.

“Not even if respectable people shut their doors against you?” he exclaimed vehemently. “Frau Griebel protests against having you at

the Hirschwinkel, on account of her innocent, young daughter," he added, with unmerciful plainness.

That seemed to hit home.

Speechless with agony, the girl clenched her hands and pressed them to her heart, but in a few moments she recovered herself and said, with the greatest decision: "The woman will have to apologize to me for this, by-and-bye. Besides, she is not mistress at the Manor; the decision rests with you, and *you* won't close the door against me ——"

"Indeed—do you think not? What do you take me for then?"

"What do I take you for?" she repeated, slowly raising her eyes to his. "For a noble man, for generosity itself. Forget, if you can, the wicked words I used to you in my blindness. What shame was mine, when I discovered your object in coming to the farm. You have saved the old people from want and misery. You ought to see the poor invalid, how she seems to have got new life since she knows herself under your care and protection; for that alone, I long to thank you." She broke off and stretched her hand out

shyly. But his gloomy face gave no signs of clearing.

“Leave that alone,” he answered roughly, motioning away her hand with his. “What have you to thank me for? What is it to the maid if I come to an arrangement with a tenant of mine? You know nothing about these things, and have no business to interfere in them”—pique and vexation were actually choking him—“as for your accusations, you may keep to them. I am not good; nothing of the kind, least of all just now. Every kind of malice and wickedness is at work in me. If I could only make you suffer, it would give me positive pleasure——”

The girl surveyed him with a wondering side-glance—he spoke so loud and vehemently.

“And then,” he resumed with more self-possession, but a proportionate increase of spite: “Stick to the truth. You pretend to thank me on the old lady’s account, but you mean, in reality, that spoilt princess up in the attic. You think the first étage at the Hirschwinkel will be an equivalent for the Guseck salons, a place to recoup and revive in, where the bird’s clipped wings can grow again.



Miss Governess, of course, must play the chief part. I suppose we shall have to decorate the Manor for her entry?"

She looked dejected and shook her head.

"The poor governesses! If their fate depended on you, they would certainly have to throw away the lesson-books and take to scrubbing and washing." She gave a faint sigh. "Your pre-conceived notion of Agnes Franz is, that she is a vain, idle, affected doll." A melancholy smile flitted round her lips, as he assented with an ironical obeisance—"but, supposing even that she had been such, the affectation must have been taken out of her on her return home. I don't deny that she very nearly lost all heart, and sometimes envisaged running away from such a difficult task at the commencement. It takes a great deal, oh, how much, before a girl of twenty becomes reconciled to such a hard lot. However, she succeeded in the end." She paused a moment as if overcome by the remembrance of all the misery she too had plunged into—then she brightened up. "And now it's all over. The dear old people are provided for for the rest of their lives and she can return in peace to her

own calling. She must accept your hospitality, it is true, as long as the invalid requires her care ——”

“Heavens, what then! We shan’t interfere with each other; I’m leaving this in a few days. Let her stay at the Hirschwinkel as long as she pleases? But you?”

“I?” she pressed her hand to her bosom and his fury knew no bounds when he saw her give a lovely smile which beautified her face, indescribably—to smile at such a moment? She was just as frivolous and worldly as her mistress. “Well, I must remain too; if you take one you must take the other.”

“There you are mistaken, I *must* do nothing of the kind, unless ——” he paused and looked at her in breathless suspense, “unless you consent to remove my worthy Griebel’s scruples by promising me never again to enter that house there, from this day forward.”

“No—that I cannot do,” she replied gravely, without a moment’s hesitation. He moved away, his eyes sparkling with fury.

“Then go your way, I won’t waste another word on you. But one thing I wish you to understand,” he said, bending towards her and

speaking in a stifled tone. "I wish you to understand that I despise you from the bottom of my heart."

She drew herself up in outraged dignity. For one moment these two beings measured each other with defiant looks, but if he mistook the tears that trembled on her lashes for those of maiden weakness and dependence, he made a great mistake, for she suddenly turned her back on him and took up her pitcher from the spring.

"Have you nothing to say, in reply?" he enquired, in a rage.

"Nothing! what does it matter, whether you despise Amtmann's poor maid or not? She lives only for a few—the notice of others only causes her pain."

So saying, she walked off direct to the forestry.

"Salute your jovial friends yonder from me," he called out. The gentle breeze seemed to have wafted the sound away, ere it had reached her ear, not the move of a muscle betrayed that she heard his impertinent speech. She marched steadily on and had disappeared in a few moments round the corner of the house.

## CHAPTER XI.

THAT very evening Herr Markus prepared for his homeward journey—it was intolerable. Why chain himself, with his own hand, to the rack in this Thuringia? The world was all before him; let him only once get back into the whirl of busy life he was accustomed to, and get rid of the benumbing atmosphere which seemed to weigh him down and concentrate his every thought, in spite of himself, on that one accursed point and he was sure to laugh over the remembrance of the Othello-like feelings which drove, nay haunted him to haunt that nest in the woods, as a marten does the dove-cot—a pretty dove-cot indeed! what was it but a wayside inn, frequented by a topping, riotous set! A dove 'twas true flew in and out—a beautiful, white dove, with deceiving eyes of sweetest purity—but, much she cared whether or not her bright plumage were soiled in that foul, unwholesome atmosphere, so long as her comings and goings

remained hidden beneath the veil of secrecy. Lies and frauds then could harbour in this quiet, out of the way corner just as elsewhere—and why not? Bella-donna and the deadly night-shade grew amongst the herbs and grasses, 'mid the cooling fruits and luxuriant flowers, while the adder's hiss was audible amongst the knarled roots of the majestic pines.

He arranged the papers for his book-keeper and sent them home with the information that he would not be satisfied with merely seeing Nuremberg and Munich, but intended extending his tour as far as Rome and Naples, which would prevent his being home as soon as he had intended. While he was writing he reflected with grim satisfaction, that amongst those sublime works of Art which fill the halls and museums in Rome, amidst the pines overlooking the gulf of Naples, it was hardly likely he would have one thought to bestow on the maiden in the working dress, or the lone, green valleys of the Thuringian forest; probably, looking back, he would fail to comprehend his present madness.

But when he drew back the curtains and threw open his windows the following morning

and the despised air met him with its bracing aromatic fragrance, laden with the perfume of strawberries, when he looked at the billowy tracts of corn bathed in sunshine all down the valley, and the towering beech casting their cool shadows on the tortuous paths winding in and out through the heart of the wood, an insupportable agony seized on this unhappy man, and a nameless longing took possession of him, which had little to do with the marble statues or soft winds of the south.

He threw aside his plaid and travelling bag and established himself, as usual, for the day, in the garden house. He avoided the side where the women kind were, and chose the path through the lime trees ; he read and wrote, let down the blinds looking towards the fir plantation and locked the door leading out on the balcony and down the little wooden steps, as fast as if it were never again to be trodden by human foot.

That whole day he remained with super-human resolution, in his self-imposed imprisonment—he even listened with apparent indifference to Frau Griebel when she came and announced that afternoon that she had

hired a new maid for the Amtmann's. This sturdy individual was to enter on her duties in a few days, so Frau Griebel had preferred going across herself to the Farm and bringing them the news—the Frau Amtmann's state had fairly horrified her; to think of her having to spend her days in bed, year after year; and yet the poor soul had been so gentle and kind, that she was only longing for the moment when she would be able to carry her about and tend her—for there was no doubt whatever, that she must take charge of the nursing herself; the few minutes she had spent there had convinced her of that—she had found the Amtmann and his wife totally alone—the old cripple who could scarcely manage to hobble along, had been obliged to open the gate for her himself, and not a spark of fire was visible in the kitchen, though it was the hour when every creature, poor or rich, always had a cup of something or other. The fine lady, the governess, was taking her afternoon nap, no doubt, and as for the other—everyone knew where she was to be found. Well, she might be off with herself now, bag and baggage, and trapse home to her forester,

for the new-comer was an actual dragon, a working bear, with hands to delight a farmer's wife. It wouldn't take her long to set things to rights, either in the house or in the fields. She wore hob-nailed shoes and woollen petticoats, such as befitted a proper village maiden. The long and the short of it was, that it was high time things were set in order, and an end put to the scandal in the Grafenholz.

While she was talking, the worthy little woman kept a sharp eye on her master, for since she had found that miracle, the Griebel coffee, cold and untouched on the writing-table, and the business papers scattered about on the floor, she had not recognized him; only now, he had been looking at her very suspiciously, as if he was longing to run his slender white fingers through her thin, but carefully arranged fair hair. She, indeed, was not the woman to make remarks on anything of the kind. She had only been giving him a piece of her mind, and had departed with the remark that she must clear out and prepare the servant's premises that very afternoon.

But no sooner had the sun set, than a hurried hand turned the key softly in the balcony-



door, drew back the bolt, and two minutes afterwards Herr Markus himself ran down the steps and marched off in the direction of the fields; the path he struck into, lay behind the offices of the farm-yard and led across a piece of meadow straight into the wood. The way-farer drew his hat down over his eyes, as if ashamed of the whispering ears of corn, and the dark tree tops which looked down on this new piece of folly with majestic severity. Every noise, the sound of his own footfall, the distant rustle of some wild herd in the bushes, the spring of the squirrels amongst the branches, all fell on his ear with acute distinctness. A policeman crying "Halt," even in that road, would have affected him far less, than the thought that Markus the strict, the upright, was capable of sneaking about strange places in that underhand way. The very goats in the stable had bleated suspiciously, and the dog had pressed his muzzle against the gate and snarled, to his extreme annoyance, while he wandered round the house and paced the turf inaudibly.

The gable windows were just as closely curtained as on the previous day, with the

exception of one on the north side, from which a bright light shone through the dim twilight. And through this window he could see just what he had feared—a sight that brought curses to his lips and tears of impotent rage to his eyes—yes, there she was, standing at the kitchen hearth ; a bright blaze suddenly flared up and illuminated her figure. He felt disposed to spring across, and with one blow upon the window panes, startle her out of the reverie that wrapt the beautiful face like a veil. But there was scarcely time, for she roused herself suddenly, pushed the cover on the stove, which extinguished the flame, and disappeared with a smoking dish through the doorway.

The watcher outside had stood one moment spell-bound to the spot, then drawing himself up to his full height, he shook the dust off his feet and passed on with a firm step just under the windows, so that Mosje Dachs bellowed loudly within and a window slammed. Very likely somebody was looking out, what of that, Herr Markus marched straight to the high road, like pedestrians in general, who found no special interest in the lonely little cottage—he

must no longer submit to be the sport of this untoward passion. Shame to the man who allows the waves of passion to swamp him. It must, it should come to an end, and it should be as though that trim, red ball and its inmates had been swallowed up by an earthquake. The stars were yet pale in the still light sky, but they were there, the few that the dense foliage permitted to be seen, they were at their posts, keeping watch over this passion-tossed soul, as they had done years ago in the days of his childhood. How poets delight to compare this steady, unwavering light with the eye of woman ! And yet, what more deceptive than just that kind of glance, full of soul, from beneath a maiden's dark eyelashes ?

The last day of this stormy week had arrived, and with it, the builder bringing the designs for the new farm house. He had business at the saw mill, whither Herr Markus accompanied him, and he spent the rest of the afternoon at the Hirschwinkel. As his carriage rolled away, Herr Markus appeared on the doorstep also, intending to stroll as far as the Farm with the design. He could venture on

thus much. The previous night had completely restored his equanimity, so completely, that he could not believe his heart had ever throbbled with one unequal pulsation. Contempt had conquered passion, and though it seemed as if the sun shone no more so brightly, as if all around was strangely still, and the darkened earth had swallowed up every vestige of life and light, he would get accustomed to these things ; better look upon a grave than be turned into a fool, as if by magic, and become ridiculous in one's own eyes.

They had begun mowing the grass in the garden at the Farm ; the swathes which were thickly interspersed with flowers, were strewn about all over the narrow path, a handkerchief had fallen amongst them, Herr Markus picked up the snowy little thing, from which exhaled a delicate perfume of violets ; Miss Governess had evidently been philandering about here and he would probably surprise her in the arbour, busy either with her work or a book. He felt very indifferent about it, and anything but anxious for an interview, so decided on merely raising his hat, but fate willed it otherwise.

The mower was standing at the table in the little arbour. Very probably she had taken refuge in that cool retreat and was taking a momentary rest in its grateful shade. The scythe lay near her on the stone slab, and a handful of grass out of which she was picking the flowers.

Herr Markus laid the handkerchief he had found, silently, on the table, and his eye scanned the slender, brown fingers ironically, he could not help thinking of the "new-comer," who would scarcely be equal to the graceful task of bouquet making, with those much lauded fists of her's.

He passed on as if the arbour was unoccupied. The Ranger had called him "brusque," and brusque he was indeed, just then ; brusque and overbearing, like those who make no account of the servants of the house where they visit, but his mood changed, even while he was crossing the yard. The old lady on her sick-bed must never know what a dislike he had taken to the Farm.

He spread the designs out on her quilt, and enjoyed watching her delighted surprise at sight of the new buildings which promised

to be so pretty. There were beautiful high windows, and glass doors opening out on the verandah. The Virginian creeper was intended to deck the trellis work and pillars, and in place of the empty farm-yard, in front of the main entrance, the sketch showed a pretty grass plot with a weeping acacia in the centre. He described to her, as she listened to him between tears and smiles, all the internal economy of the house, but he turned a deaf ear to the Amtmann's ludicrous pretensions and suggestions, he had suddenly become quite cockahoop. This incorrigible old bragger was at his old tricks, master of the situation—in fact, it was he that was building the house. He chattered about parquet flooring, velvet furniture which he intended to order for the drawing room, and found fault with there being no proper entrance for a carriage to drive in. All this time he kept limping about the room in a state of excitement, and wrapping his darned old dressing-gown about him, as if it were a splendid fur mantle.

Herr Markus only smiled and pressed the invalid's hand reassuringly, as she looked nervously at him while all this was going on,

and told her, that on his return to Berlin, he would look out a comfortable arm-chair for her, in which her removal to the Manor could easily be effected. Then he rose as if in haste. Very likely it was the heated air of the room that drove the blood to his head, and made his temples throb almost to bursting, he felt he must get into the open air, must catch a breath, he had no other reason, he might indeed have gone home by the yard'gate, but the sun was shining there red-hot on the neglected, stony road, while the garden offered grateful shade beneath the trees. Why then, should he not go through the garden ?

## CHAPTER XII.

HE held the wicket gate in his hand to prevent it slamming, and stood a moment quite still, because—well, because the cool was so refreshing—he watched the girl over on the grass plot rise and take the governess's scented handkerchief out of her pocket, and bury her face in it. This intimacy between mistress and maid, extended as he now saw, with his own eyes, to a community of goods.

Her back was turned to him, but he could see by the movement of her shoulders that she was sobbing convulsively. In another moment he was beside her. "What are you crying about?" he enquired half in jest and half in earnest. The girl uttered a low cry, and involuntarily let the handkerchief fall. Her eyes indeed, were red with weeping, but they flashed on her interlocutor with the fiercest scorn. She made no answer, and took up her scythe again, as if to resume her work without noticing either him or his question.



"Am I to receive no answer?" he repeated in a low tone.

She was evidently struggling with herself, and at last said from between her teeth: "Not until I can prove to you, how deeply you have insulted me."

"Oh, you mean to prove that, do you?" he said with a bitter laugh. "I should like to know how you intend to set about it, but—" and here his tone changed completely and took a passionate tinge—"prove it to me, and of one thing I can assure you, I will beg your pardon on my bended knees."

She looked surprised, and flushed crimson then her head sank upon her bosom, like one convicted.

"I knew it," he said, looking at her disdainfully. "You were at the Grafenholz yesterday evening."

"And you too," she added quietly. This calmness struck him, and he felt bitterly ashamed she should have detected him playing the spy.

"I was not aware that passers by were subject to any control at the forestry," he said, half in embarrassment, half in rage.

“There is neither time nor inclination for anything of that kind at the forestry,” she replied in the same calm tone as before. “The dog began to bark ——”

“And you looked out to welcome the master home,” he added, completing the sentence sarcastically. “The soup was ready, all he had to do, was to take his seat at the table. He has good times of it. You’re wonderfully alert and familiar already in your future home.”

She stared at him, at first in blank amazement; gradually his meaning dawned upon her. She coloured, and a mischievous smile lurked round the corner of her lips.

“We’re going to migrate to the forestry?” she said, interrogatively.

“Not ‘we,’ if, by that you mean your family. I fancy Fräulein Agnes Franz would scarcely fancy such a come-down in the house of her former maid.”

“The forestry belongs to his Highness, the Prince,” she replied, suppressing a laugh, “and I don’t see how I could ever have any right to dispose of it. At all events, I’ve been long enough in Thuringia, and when Fräulein Agnes

Franz goes, I shall go too, to seek my bread out in the world."

He stared at her speechless with amazement.

"I would fain believe you," he said slowly, without removing his eyes from her face, "did I not know you to be false."

Her lips quivered, but she accepted the accusation with apparent calm.

"I don't attempt to contradict you; what is the use of talking to the wind. You see through the mist of prejudice, and I dare not raise a finger to set you right—unfortunately, there is one point, on which in time to come you may, with justice, accuse me of having played a false game."

"Yes, the unpardonable game of female coquetry, which you have learned from that confounded woman of the world."

"I don't admit that." This was said with great decision and a steady look into his angry eyes.

He laughed with a dubious smile. "I should like to know the Ranger's opinion about that."

"He thinks just as I do, and feels as much relieved and thankful that the fearful days of trouble at the Farm are past and gone."

“And by virtue of this consolation is he expected to overlook the fact that you have played with him cruelly?”

The girl threw back her head haughtily and a sharp reply hovered on her lips, but she controlled herself, and answered quietly:—

“Do you call the severe labour in the fields which we have shared together loyally like a pair of tried comrades, playing? Fritz Weber is an honest noble-hearted fellow, to whom I shall be grateful all my life. I have promised, in consequence—” and here a roguish gleam stole over her beautiful face to vanish as quickly—“to be present at his wedding, if I had to come across the seas on purpose. In two years he will have got a position that will enable him to bring his true-love home from his former station, Magdeburg.”

Herr Markus's face cleared up as though a light had entered his soul. “And you intend crossing the sea, then? Is Miss Governess going to try her fortune there too?”

She shrugged her shoulders and replied, laconically. “Perhaps,” while she passed her slender fingers over the blade of the scythe, as if to make sure there was no speck there.

“Don't do that,” he said, in a tone of nervous irritation. “You will hurt yourself, throw away that infernal implement. You don't want it any more; no more than your young lady her flower painting.”

The girl let her right hand fall, but never thought of throwing away the scythe. “I shall remain at my post and do my work until my substitute arrives,” she replied quietly, “and why my young lady should give up an art she loves, I fail to understand.”

“Didn't you tell me she was going across the sea? Is not that the road to her fool's paradise, where the long dreamed of diamond princes dwell?”

She gave a slight sneer. “What an estimate rich men form of the power of wealth,” she said bitterly.

He laughed. “Is the estimate a mistaken one? Oh, dear no. It is confirmed every day. Given a shower of diamonds over head and neck, a palace in some populous city, and a fairy-like summer resort amongst gay friends, and one of these worldly ladies will vow that the owner of such splendours must be

enchanting, were he black and brutal as the devil himself. Don't you believe that?"

"Oh certainly, if you say so," she answered back in the same bantering tone. "The one I know, has her own fancies too. Is it not very presumptuous of her, she actually allows herself likes and dislikes just like you? I know she estimates the advantages of wealth much at the same value you do those detestable governesses—far below her notice."

This sharp reply betrayed the bitterest annoyance, but he seemed unconscious of it.

"Don't let yourself be fooled that way," he said, "you are a sensible girl with a mind which, in your sphere of life, is little short of a miracle, but your young mistress's inner life has remained a sealed book to you. Let her be off then, to her El Dorado. I wish her every success. May she be happy in her own way, if she but leave her shadow behind her. You don't intend to go with her—you'll remain at the Hirshwinkel, won't you?" he said almost in a tone of entreaty.

But she was quite unmoved. "Remain here? To await my fate?" she said in a hard, contemptuous tone.

"It might come and fetch you away sooner than you anticipate," he stammered out—the sound of a heart wildly throbbing was audible in those uncertain tones. He approached her with a sudden movement, but she drew back with an air of displeasure and involuntarily raised her right hand in defence—the glitter of the scythe flashed between them.

"I shall have to take this odious toy from you," he said angrily, and snatching at it.

Quick as thought, but how it happened neither of them knew—he started back and she, with a loud cry, flung the scythe away from her.

"Am I to blame?" she stammered out in horror.

"And if you are, quite right too," he said, taking out his handkerchief to tie round his wounded hand. "One must pay the penalty. Experience teaches fools wisdom," and he gave a passing smile which showed all his fine white teeth. "I ought to have known from the very first day I met you on the bridge, and you favoured me with those wonderful replies, that the Thuringian thistles stung badly, and yet, here I've been and fallen into a bed of


m, again." He made an ironical obeisance and said, "so now, fair prude, we're quits. I've got my share."

She made no reply but stood transfixed, gazing in terror at the white handkerchief which soon became saturated with blood. At that sight she turned and fled through the garden, disappearing amongst the raspberry bushes. Despite his ill-humour, he could not help laughing. This brave heart, which had taken upon itself such a heavy task with real heroism, could not stand the sight of blood, and left her victim in the lurch. He felt sure his wound was of no consequence, and a slight loss of blood could do him no injury—had it not been pulsing wildly through his veins for years past, as if he had a bad fever, upsetting his mind and brain—he was ashamed of himself. He deserved nothing better than to be laughed at by all his friends. If they had but seen him just then; he was the picture of a youngster sent home for naughtiness. He could not think on that homeric laughter without clenching his fists. Then, what a miserable failure that panoply of contempt he had encased himself in had proved. One



glance at those tear-stained eyes and it had vanished into thin air. Where too was the bright humour gone, by which he had hitherto been able to shake off all the cobwebs, whether of mind or body, he felt none of it now, he cared not what became of him.

As he walked along—he had left the garden on the spot—the lonely path through the fir plantation, where no human eye could see him, where perfect stillness reigned, and the drip of soft young pine needles fell coolingly on his bare brow, he fought with himself and his feelings of bitter disappointment. For one brief moment his heart had throbbed with delight, as though the sunshine of illimitable joy was breaking over him; the girl was innocent and free; none other had any claim upon her, she had proved it unmistakably, but what use was that to *him*? He was forced to admit he had just as little prospect of winning her himself. No waiting, no future hopes availed here, let hope with her delusive wiles say what she might—the girl would none of him—his own honest, straightforward mind told him so, and there was nothing else for it



but to strive manfully against losing the "little bit of self-respect" that still remained to him.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE heat was intense and oppressive in the pavilion. There had been no rain for some considerable time ; day after day the sun had risen and set on the same cloudless, blue sky, till everything was gradually burned up by it, roofs and walls, woods and thickets, and every field in the whole country round.

Herr Markus thought Frau Griebel was not far wrong in her unpoetical but bitter assertion, that a blue sky of that kind, without ever a blessed bit of cloud in it for ages, reminded her of a wicked face, making game of the creatures on God's earth. He felt as if the scorching sun, beneath which the ripe corn began to flag, and leaf and floweret showed the first symptoms of decay, was penetrating the very marrow of his bones, and that he could hear malicious voices laughing at the helpless "creatures on the face of God's earth," who were obliged to submit to their destiny, whether it was one of brightest joy or bitterest sorrow.

His hand burned like a live coal. It was

well for him he had provided himself in his little retreat with carafes of fresh water and washing utensils, so that he could avoid going up to the house and running in Frau Griebel's way, that was the last thing he wished for, but he could not escape his fate.

Just as he was plunging his hand into the basin, the worthy little woman appeared at the top of the steps, puffing and blowing. She had come to find out if he was there, on account of the afternoon coffee.

She was not the woman to make any great ado about a mere cut, but she could not help looking incredulous when Herr Markus announced that he had cut himself with a pen-knife, and she said in her dry way: "How you managed that, Herr Markus, I cannot imagine, if it was your thumb or forefinger, I could understand it, but in the palm!" She did not express her own very natural conclusion. "How exceedingly awkward you must be," but it evidently cost her some effort. She went off at once, in search of arnica and old linen, telling him he must have patience, and keep his hand in the water till she found the things. Old linen was not always at hand,

and as for the arnica, she didn't know rightly where it might be, nobody had required it at their house within the memory of man.

Silence reigned once more in the tiny apartment. The balcony door stood wide open, and a lazy breath of air came floating in every now and then, but without cooling the atmosphere. Herr Markus was sitting on the sofa, a small nécessaire lay open before him, out of which he took a piece of sticking-plaister—he had intended making short work of it, to prevent Frau Griebel's handling the wound—now, he forgot all about it. His head buried in his hands, his eyes closed, he was back again in the Farm garden; that beautiful face, in its deadly pallor, so close to his that he could almost feel her breath upon his cheek. "I verily believe I shall go mad about this girl," he muttered between his teeth, running his hands wildly through his rich dark hair.

Just then there was a sound of something rustling on the steps—light, almost as noiseless as the velvet tread of a cat. It could not be a man; this corner of the garden lay so remote and none of the few people living near, would have ventured to pass that way, so near the house.

Herr Markus looked up, and a sudden fear possessed him that he must be dreaming ; it was, indeed, a human foot he had heard ascending, and that now reached the door-way. She, the prude, whose cheeks and lips had not yet resumed their natural hue, despite the burning heat that had heightened every one else's colour—she—coming to him—to his house ! Just, he supposed, as she was accustomed to go in and out of the Ranger's house without hesitation. She paid no heed to the demands of mere propriety, she cared not at all about the scandal-mongers' tongues—indeed, she had told him so. There, then, she stood, looking in shyly, still half and half on the neutral ground of the balcony, but yet, with the unmistakable intention of venturing in.

A strange mixture of delight at seeing her, and annoyance at her taking such a step, rose up in him, and added to this, the fear that Frau Griebel might return at any moment. That, indeed, would be adding fuel to the fire. The last ray of her reputation would be gone then.

He sprang up—his face the colour of crimson.

“What do you want?” he enquired, unsteadily and almost rudely. The sound seemed to overset the girl, for she turned involuntarily to catch at the balustrade, and put her hand over her eyes; but she soon recovered herself.

“The—the Amtmann sends his best thanks for the books you lent him, and would be very much obliged if you would let him have ‘Munchausen,’ by Immermann,” she said, handing him two books she had brought in a basket on her arm. Ah, she had been sent as the maid of the family; how strange, he should always keep forgetting her real position in life! If the Amtmann had sent her, of course, she must obey; even Frau Griebel could not deny that.

“The book is not here,” he replied, with a relieved air, “but if you wait a moment I will fetch it.” He wrapped a towel round his still bleeding hand, and was just about to open the door leading into the garden, when he found the girl at his side.

“There is no hurry about that,” she said quickly, with shy embarrassment; “I was to have left the books with the Ranger, that he might get them changed; he will

fetch them this evening ; please, give them to him."

Suddenly she hid her face in her hands, apparently overcome with shame.

"How painful," she murmured, taking away her hands and standing with down-cast eyes before him. "Bringing the books was only a pretext for getting in—very likely, you guessed that yourself. I came, because I couldn't endure to have caused you pain, without trying to cure it. Let me repair it, as far as I can."

Oh, how soon were his recent reflections forgotten! Frau Griebel's offended sense of propriety, his own wise lucubrations, who could expect him to recall such trivialities, when he listened to those melting tones and gazed at that sweet pale face, drooping before him. Involuntarily he bent down intending to enfold her in his arms, and shelter her, as it were, for evermore from every ill. But that one rash movement on his part, had frightened her away again, as far as the door-step ; she seemed absolutely terrified at the effect her words had produced on him, and stood with foot upraised, ready to fly at any further attempt, on his part, to approach her.



“When I ran into the house that time,” she said curtly, “it was to fetch a bandage; but when I returned you were gone. I do not know if I alone am to blame for this unfortunate occurrence; at least, I was incautious, and that gave me no peace and drove me here. I should not like to have guilt upon my conscience, unatoned for; not towards any human being, be they who they may.”

“Indeed. Well then, accept my thanks for your kind intentions,” he said, as he walked to the table with a bitter smile. “You can return home re-assured. I alone am to blame. What business had I to approach the perverse wielder of a scythe. Moreover, as you see,” and he pointed to the nécessaire—“I was just about to plaster up the evidence of my folly.”

“That is not sufficient,” she replied, at once with great decision, and again advancing into the room. “The wound is rather deep, I saw it, and have a remedy which will prevent inflammation, and secure its rapid healing.” She opened the lid of the basket she had brought with her, and took out a packet of linen. “Allow me to bind it up. You may trust

yourself in my hands ; I am not unfamiliar with the duties of a nurse."

"Heaven forbid ! Do you suppose I would accept such a sacrifice on your part ? Never, lovely prude. Any one who knows, as I do, the effort these Samaritan tasks cost you, would never venture on accepting one a second time. Do you remember the scene on the bridge, when I was obliged to appeal to your Christian charity, before you would release me, poor devil that I was, out of the stocks. No, go your way quietly home, or rather to the Ranger's, and tell him he can fetch the book here this evening, it shall be ready for him."

But she did nothing of the kind—quite the contrary. Standing close to Herr Markus at the table, she undid the bundle of linen, uncorked a small medicine bottle, and spread out the various ligaments. She did it all as deftly, and with as much silent gravity, as if she had been a doctor dealing with a refractory patient.

"Scold me, pass what sentence you please on me, despise me even more than you have hitherto done, but, from this I do not stir, until I have fulfilled my task," she said gently, but firmly.

“But I won't accept this 'fulfilment of your task'. I refuse it point blank, thereby giving you the proof that you have done all any human being can do, to satisfy a sensitive conscience. Will that satisfy you?” He was trembling with excitement.

The girl shook her head. “I was too vehement a little while ago, and hurt you by my hasty words. You are quite right in expecting self-command as the first requisite in a nurse, so I ask you now to forget my inconsiderate behaviour.”

She held out her hand timidly.

“Much ado about nothing,” he said, half jesting, half angry, but without taking any notice of her gesture. “Such a skin-deep scratch is not worth talking about—even if I had the patience to sit still, till it was bandaged, I should tear it off, the next moment. I am far too ——”

“Be good,” she interposed in gentle tones. These tones had a magic effect upon him, he shrugged his shoulders resignedly, turned away his head, and leaning with his left hand on the table, stretched out the right one silently.

It was evident she was familiar with the

duties of a nurse ; such a calm collected method of examination was not due to the mere innate dexterity of woman.

Herr Markus slowly turned his head and looked down at her.

“ Were you in a Deaconess’s Institute ? ” he inquired, in manifest surprise.


“ Yes, but not for long, and not exactly with a view to becoming a nurse. My object was, to gain sufficient knowledge to enable me at any time, when help was not at hand immediately in the country, to render any assistance that might be necessary.” All this time she never paused at her task ; just then she looked up and he could see the tears in her eyes. “ The scythe was notched, so you will have to call in the doctor after all,” she said.

He laughed.

“ Sew on bravely,” he replied, “ and trust the rest to my robust constitution.”


She set her teeth and handled the needle with skill and rapidity, though her slender fingers trembled a little now and then. There certainly was some great mystery about her—child of what was she ? Her language, her whole being, the half-suppressed yet constant

disclosure of her varied powers, bore indisputable testimony to her real origin—yet, she fulfilled the meanest duties, and Miss Governess, who best knew the rich treasures of that heart and mind, held her remorselessly in the bondage of that degrading position. What was it gave the egotist such power over this marvellous girl's mind and fate? His eye was rivetted on the beauteous head bent over his hand, on the magnificent nut-brown hair folded simply back, from which a stream of magnetic power seemed to enchain him—his breathing grew oppressed—laboured. The black velvet ribbon, this time loosely tied, was again visible on the little glimpse of white neck, uncovered by the kerchief. Did she wear an amulet or a souvenir round her neck, which she never laid aside? A jealous qualm sent the life-blood from his heart, he would fain have seized the loosened end and flung it away. The girl had little idea what traitorous deeds he was meditating or she would never have raised her eyes with that look of intense gratitude. The bandaging was finished; she gently dropped the hand and went to the table to pack up her little case.



“ I thank you,” she said with an air of relief, as if a weight had been lifted off her heart. “ I will come again to-morrow and see how it is going on.”

He had no objection to make to that, but he said nothing. Wicked, traitorous fancies were chasing each other through his brain. Gazing with the outward calm of a stoic at her occupation, he dreamed that a gust of wind seized the little nest on the garden wall, and bore it, and every soul in it, away more swiftly than an engine, winged as thought, through the air, and set it down in the grounds of the Villa Markus—far behind them, in the Thuringian woods, lay the inexplicable power owned by the attic egoist ; the house in the Grafenholz, with its strange attraction and its unsolved mystery—once set free from all that entangled her, this longed for one would be thrown entirely on him for protection—yield her up again he never would. Something like this was the delusive and enticing web which fancy wove as he stood near her, inhaling the faint odour of violets—Miss Governess’s favourite perfume, which hung around the servant’s coarse garments, too. And what was there to prevent his



playing the tempest himself, and carrying the day by sudden and ardent wooing. Nothing but the girl's own will. Nothing but the obstinacy in that wise young head. Should he really live to hear Amtmann's maid refuse, in a few curt syllables, to become the mistress at Villa Markus? New, and unheard of, indeed, such a conclusion, when he thought of the many Governess's efforts—imposing too—but he knew it well beforehand, and Markus junior, who was an adept in playing off gay coquettes at home, was on his guard, not to give that grave young maiden in the working dress an opportunity of a short and cutting refusal.

## CHAPTER XIV.

**A**S a rule, he had not the slightest objection to Frau Griebel's visits ; he rather liked a chat with her ; but, at that moment, the sound of those creaking shoes, stamping lustily up the balcony steps, was odious to him. He noticed too, that the colour rose vividly to the girl's cheek, but further than that, she took no notice, but went on folding up the bundle of linen.

Her little daughter Louisa, had accompanied her. The salver they carried between them barely sufficed to carry the raspberry vinegar, bottle of selters-water, coffee apparatus, tincture of arnica, and goodness knows what besides, that the worthy little rolly-polly had collected in her haste.

“ Well—I never ! ” she exclaimed, pausing at the top of the steps as if glued to the spot. With more agility than her wont, she wheeled round to her little assistant, and prepared to block up the door-frame with her portly person,



so that the curious young eyes behind her might not be able to see in.

“Alas, my good Griebel, you come too late,” said Herr Markus. “After all, it’s not such a bad plan to have plenty of old linen and arnica close at hand, like the people at the Farm. The accident occurred there, and as I have a holy horror of bandages—I am timid by nature—I ran away, but all in vain,” here he shrugged his shoulders, with a face grave as a judge—“for the doctor followed close on my heels, and I was obliged to yield, whether I would or not. See for yourself, most attentive of foster-mothers, the gaping wound is sewn together, artistically sewn, and I should like to see the person who could find fault with the bandaging.”

“You don’t say so—actually sewn,” and with these words, down went the salver with a bang, and little Louisa’s entry was no longer debarred.

“All right,” continued Frau Griebel, “but don’t be telling stories about your ‘timid nature’. I wasn’t born yesterday, Herr Markus. My faith, if the bandage doesn’t look as if our old doctor at Castle Heinrich

had done it himself. He is a first-rate man, quite a celebrated physician, Herr Markus. Aye, aye, the Tillröder barber may hide his diminished head before bandaging like that. And you did it? You, Amtmann's maid?" He fixed a keen glance on the girl. "How is it that the girls in your part of the world learn to do men's work? There's my Louisa goes to a school where everything possible and impossible is taught, but they have nothing of this kind—have they, Louisa?"

"No Mamma," replied the little maiden, who had hitherto remained silently watching Amtmann's beautiful maid—"but a school-fellow of mine, who is engaged as governess in southern Prussia, and is going there after master is taking lessons in nursing at the seaconess's Home."

"Oh, then, that's it, and you've learned it from your mistress," said Frau Griebel to the girl, who had now finished packing up her basket and was just putting on the cover. That is a very good and practical sort of thing, in case of an accident like that of our master's here. No wonder she sent you to look after it. Of course she couldn't venture here

herself, into a gentleman's room—that would be a pretty scandal for a judge's niece. I'd like to hear what my folk in the kitchen would have to say about such a thing."

A crimson flush rose to the maiden's cheeks and her hands felt for the knot of her large neckkerchief, to untie it.

"What are you talking about?" said Herr Markus angrily. "What has become of my worthy Griebel's usual good sense? What sensible being, I should like to know, would pay attention to the rubbish talked in the kitchen? Medical aid, rendered by whom it may be, stands above the pale of conventionality. That would be a nice kind of helper who paused, before coming to the rescue of a drowned or wounded man, to consider whether or not it was proper."

"Well, the bleeding wasn't altogether so dangerous, Herr Markus," replied Frau Griebel, with unalterable composure. "Your fine speech wasn't quite applicable, and the coarse tongues of the country folk can injure a lady's reputation, just as mice will gnaw a hole in the finest as well as the homeliest gown. You ought to hear their tongues wagging, for

instance, about that girl standing there, but I'm not going to burn my fingers again, not I, I'll say no more —" and she broke off abruptly.

"I request you will not," said Herr Markus with grave displeasure.

"My goodness, what a face you put on about it, Sir. Worthy Griebel's an old fox, isn't she; the enemy of youth; but she's nothing of the kind, and never was. I've been an admirer of pretty girls all my life-long. In my own youth too, and I daresay I fancied looking at a reed like that all the more, because I never was pretty myself, always just such a little fat, roundabout of a thing as I am now; but Peter liked me notwithstanding, and it always went to my heart to hear any one I cared for, talked about and pointed at—oh, you needn't be trying to steal away," she said, turning on the girl who was gently trying to make her escape by the balcony door, but the little woman seized her by the apron and held her fast, just the way she had done at the mill. "What I am saying just applies to you, to a nicety—now, that you've got rid of those winkers a person can see what you're like. You're a beautiful girl, envy can't deny that,

my faith, such a face is not to be seen far or near —”

She was silenced for a moment, absolutely rebuffed, for the girl had torn off her handkerchief at those last words and thrown it over her head. Rage got the better of Frau Griebel's equanimity.

“Hoity-toity, are you a nun, or a Roman Catholic, that you have to do penance? Is it an insult for an honest woman to look you in the face? Heavens above, what a saint! Tell me, my lass, do you play the shy bird that way in the Ranger's house?”

A loud exclamation on Louisa's part put an end to this harangue. The girl's sudden action had loosened the velvet ribbon and it had fallen on the ground. She had paid it as little heed as the furious woman beside her; Herr Markus had watched it slipping down all the more eagerly, and he now hurriedly seized it. A gold medallion was attached to it, at sight of which Louisa had given a scream of delight. Just then the girl's eye caught the medallion dangling to the ribbon, and she felt round her neck.

“The medallion is mine,” she said quietly, stretching out her hand to receive it.

“Yours. See here, my girl, I can’t swallow that,” said Frau Griebel, pushing her frightened little Louisa aside, that she might fight the matter out herself. “I know that coin as well as I know my own name—it belongs to my Louisa as sure as two and two make four. Those kind of family pieces don’t run about the world in heaps ; our lady said as much the day she hung that round my Louisa’s neck at her confirmation—it was a very solemn occasion, the mere thought of it overpowers me still. So now confess—and no more shall be said about it—you found the medallion out there in front of the house, and you were tempted to try, just for once, how a pretty shining thing like that became you.”

The girl grew white to her lips.

“To wear an ornament found by the roadside would be stealing,” she replied, with compressed lips.

“Stealing ?” repeated Frau Griebel shaking her head. “Who said so, you silly girl? You? You don’t look much like it. An experienced eye like mine knows that kind of cattle at a

glance. If you knew anything about picking and stealing you'd have better clothes on your back. But, you're young and a little vanity's excusable. I don't blame you, not I. I'm only too glad we've got the trinket back again. Tie it on tighter, next time, Lousia."

"Not this medallion, at all events," the girl said, with decision. "In that case, it would be your daughter who was wearing what does not belong to her. It has been mine for years," she said, turning gravely to Herr Markus, "and now—now—it must be told—that it too was the property of the late Frau Oberforstmeisterin. Look at the inscription. It is one of the earliest Sicilian coins belonging to the twelfth century."

"Quite right," he answered in confirmation. "I know it, and the motto runs: Sit tibi, Christe, datus ——"

"Quem tu regis, iste Ducatus," she said, completing the sentence.

He smiled, and laid the coin in her hand. "Such proof was unnecessary—one thing surprises me, that your egotistical mistress can have such fits of generosity as to deck her

maid with the pretty souvenirs given her by the late Frau Oberforstmeisterin."

The girl coloured, but said nothing, and untying the handkerchief under her chin, fastened the ribbon round her throat.

"And you expect me to stand by, like a stick, and believe all that," said Frau Griebel angrily, pointing to the girl's brown fingers as she hurriedly tied the ribbon in a knot. "I'm to allow Amtmann's maid to fasten the medallion my Louisa has worn every day for the last three years, coolly round her own throat. And all because this non-such had the wit to notice the verse upon it; it's true, I couldn't repeat a line of it myself if you gave me the world for it. I never knew any of that foreign gibberish. I'm good plain German, what's all that French twaddle to me?"

"It's Latin, mother," said little Louisa, laughing, and putting her arm round the excited little woman's shoulders.

"I don't care, French or Latin, it's all the same to me. Be off, you pussy, I don't intend to let myself be talked over this time; and it isn't very nice of you, Herr Markus, to take the part of a young vagabond like that against



an honest woman, neither are you called on to play the part of King Solomon. No offence meant, Herr Markus, but proofs are wanting to give a proper sentence. Laugh away, laugh away, I don't mind your laughing; don't I know the laugh 'll be on my side in the end. The girl says that medallion belonged to our old lady too, but Amtmann's maid there never saw the Hirschwinkel till the Frau Oberforstmeisterin had been long in her grave. Has the departed rained medallions from heaven for the sake of one who is obliged to earn her bread, for one whom she never laid eyes on in all her life? Don't tell me such a thing; and pray how many medallions might the old lady have had? People don't hang their necks all over with them, one is all that is ever worn."

"People may wear nine such, most respected Griebel, hanging on a gold chain, such as I found among my aunt's assets," put in Herr Markus, with an air of mingled amusement and annoyance. "By-and-bye, you shall see the proofs you demand. You shall see for yourself that there are two gold coins wanting on the chain, and there can be no doubt that one found its way to the Farm—or do you

mean to deny that the family living there were on terms of the closest intimacy with the departed ?”

“Dear heart, how could I deny that? and are there really nine pieces on one chain, and all alike?” she enquired, for once put out and put down. “Well, I didn’t know that,” she added apologetically. “Our old lady was not one to bedizen herself with ornaments, and what on earth would it have been for? When the Tillröder festival was held, which included the Hirschwinkel, the top storey of the Manor used to be fast shut for days, and not a mouse, unless it were an odd guest, would have found as much as a crumb of cake in the cupboard. Company keeping and holding high festival were none of her business. Well then, I suppose, it must be so. The Frau Amtmann or Fräulein Franz must have got the other medallion; but how then, I should like to know, does it come on that throat there? Perhaps you can tell us, young woman,” she said, speaking over her shoulder at the girl. “You don’t mean to tell me that the ladies at the Farm like seeing their ornaments worn by the servant, especially on week-days when you’re

scouring and working in the hay with that shabby old rag which'll soon fall off you—it's a show ——”

“Mamma, mamma,” put in little Louisa, gently expostulating. The young girl's eyes were fixed on the “Touch-me-not,” who met all the insults heaped upon her with the same haughty reserve, “that sounds so unkind, so unlike you, who are always so good and sympathizing, and can't bear to see tears in any-one's eyes. The ladies at the Farm must have given away the medallion.”

“Given it away!” shrieked Frau Griebel. “That's like the chirping of a grasshopper, that thinks itself mighty wise, when its only silly. At the Farm, indeed, where poverty is cook, where afternoons they haven't as much as a cup of coffee, and the old gentleman stalks about in a dressing-gown that's just like a map for darns—it's likely they give away medallions to the servants there—aye, aye, medallions indeed! You young goose, I don't like to see wet eyes indeed, but look at those black ones there! No tears in them ——”

She paused a moment, and looked at Herr

Markus, who held up his hand to stop her, but his lowering brow produced no effect upon her. "Well, what have you got to say against that, Herr Markus," she enquired, quite pleasantly. "Does that minx there look as if she had ever shed a tear in her life? Nothing but a very devil of conceit lurks in those eyes; they look down upon the like of us, as if we were dust on the road-side. I have no sympathy with such; it would be hypocrisy to say I had. However, I've done. It's not *our* medallion, I see that, and who the other belongs to, is no business of mine. The good people themselves must see to that. I'm not treasure-master at the Farm."

She walked to the table and began arranging the tray. The girl went off. In vain did Herr Markus endeavour to catch her eye—her face remained inscrutable as marble. She never once raised her eyes, but passing him by, ran down the steps.

Louisa, magnetically attracted, followed, and stood watching her from the balcony. "Don't leave us in anger," she whispered piteously.

The girl, who was just then passing under the balcony, never once looked up, or gave the

faintest token that she had heard what was said.

“Don’t give yourself fruitless trouble, Louisa,” said Herr Markus, who had joined her, in a loud, pointed tone. “Your childlike entreaty will never undo *that*. The innocent must suffer with the guilty; that is the way with women. I’ve fallen under the bann too, because I thought *one* word in defence would only have been an additional insult.”

“Come in, Louisa,” said Frau Griebel, dictatorially. “Don’t be going on with nonsense. Let this non-such go. I suppose we’re expected to pick and choose our words as if we were at court, though any fool could see the story about the medallion is a very lame one. Herr Markus, that’s a girl just like other girls, and because she chooses to give herself airs, is no manner of reason why she should go on as if she were the Amtmann’s niece herself. That kind of thing ruins servants, and there’s no bearing them then.”

While talking thus, she drew near the balcony herself, polishing up the tumbler for the Selters-water all the while. “I should like to know now where the young lady at the

Farm picked her up. She always looks to me like a runaway gipsy. Like them, she knows all kinds of arts; she has a foreign tongue, and just look at her there as she walks along through the wood. Her kerchief has fallen off her head, and she has never noticed it, there it is lying in the road. Now we have it, the real giddy gipsy blood. And hasn't she just that kind of blue-black hair? It actually glistens in the sun. Aye, slim and bright and lithe as lizards are the Bohemians—the old witches steal the purses out of women's pockets, and the young ones, many a time, the heart out of a man's breast. Just you wait, Herr Markus, the story of the medallion is not finished yet, we shall hear more about it."

"Let us wait till we do then," he said, cutting her short, and taking up one of the books the girl had brought with her.

"Aye, aye, there's nothing else for it, but we shan't have to wait long, I can tell you," she muttered, as she watched him stalking off to the house, leaving her and all the fine things she had brought with her alone in the pavilion. Later on, when the servants told her that he had gone straight out of the house

into the wood, she was in a royal rage. Peter Griebel grinned and twirled his thumbs when she marched up to him—he had just sat down to supper under the pear tree—and said in less equable tones than usual, “I really believe that the good man imagines that the Griebel was sent into the world expressly for his use. There, I’ve been and made his coffee for him in all that heat and worry, went down to the cellar and fetched Selters-water for him, tore up a beautiful new shirt of my own spinning—that’s what vexes me most of all—hunted in every nook and corner for the arnica, and all for nothing.”

## CHAPTER XV.

SO then, she was a gipsy ; that was the solution. Amidst the wild life of the camp, she had grown to maturity. The worthy Griebel had thrown out this bold hypothesis like a ball, which Herr Markus had caught at, half against his will, and which he had been examining since the previous day with an incredulous eye—he laughed, when he thought of the grace, and prominent characteristics of the girl's mental confirmation, which pointed unmistakably to home education, and refined intercourse ; he laughed, reflecting that the brown eyes—Frau Griebel in her anger, had pronounced them black—should have preserved their maiden purity, and the white skin its softness, 'midst a life spent with savage hordes, from childhood upwards. Yet dim forebodings crossed him now and then : could those mysterious visitants at the Forestry have any connection with the life she had escaped from ? Had they discovered and laid claim to her, and had that trusty comrade the



Ranger, consented to a gathering of these shy, nomad tribes at his house with a view to tranquillizing them and setting the girl perfectly free? But that was like an adventure, and when he thought of her, her severe toil, her unexampled truth and devotion to her family, he rejected such thoughts as absurd, as positively ludicrous. But he had seen her again the evening before at the Forestry. After wandering the woods for hours, he had found himself at last—of course, quite unintentionally—in the old haunt; to him it was like the magic ring, *nightly drawn* by the souls of departed lovers round their victims, like the rails against which the stately stag, in vain beats his antlers—the spell which hung around the Hirschwinkel, and the spot of earth where stood the Ranger's house, would never more set him free.

Well, he had played the eaves-dropper late in the evening too. Before he was aware of it, he found himself mounted on the bench under the window with the blue blinds; a pale blue light issued from the windows, a halo as bewitching and fascinating to him, as to the crowds of moths and butterflies, lured

thither from the marsh and bushes. One of the blinds was slightly drawn up, and afforded him a glimpse into the interior of the room, and because it was so still, so deadly still throughout the now darkened woods, and everything living seemed stupefied by the sultry atmosphere, he had distinctly caught the sound of a man's voice inside. It had a monotonous sound, almost like a soul confessing and was frequently interrupted by difficulty of breathing and heavy sighs.

The lamp did not suffice to light the roomy apartment; the larger half of it remained in darkness, and there the maiden sat quite still, leaning her head against the high-backed arm-chair, her hand stretched out as if some one were holding it in theirs; the arm seemed moved every now and then. Herr Markus had made every possible effort to discover who it was that was sitting in the corner, talking so incessantly and holding the girl's hand in his, as tightly as if she belonged to him, but just at that spot, the abominable window-frame was too broad, and the invisible person was not so gracious as to bend forward for a single moment.

Obscure as the light was, the girl's face was visible in it; its expression was one of pain, and those despised eyes, which "could never have known a tear," had been fixed on the speaker in anguish and grief. All at once she had risen, and hearkened to something—the sound of horse's hoofs, which had been worrying Herr Markus for some time past, had probably caught her ear. It was high time to abdicate the post of listener. Herr Markus had retreated into the thicket, and immediately afterwards, a horseman had appeared round the corner of the road.

The equestrian who thus emerged out of the shadow of the silent woods, into the dim twilight, assumed quite gigantic proportions, and a certain air of mystery, and it was not hard to imagine a man of such stature, with his slouched hat, and jacket adorned with silver coins, the head of some gipsy tribe.

As he drew near, the hall-door had been opened noiselessly, and the keeper had appeared on the steps equally gently. He had greeted the gentleman in a whisper, and taking the horse by the bridle had led it up and down, while the rider went into the house.

The riddle might have been solved then and there, had not Mosje Dachs unfortunately interfered.

The animal made a sudden rush out of the house, and began barking at the horse, till a kick from his master silenced and flung him in the direction where the listener stood concealed.

On the dog re-commencing to bark, Herr Markus had emerged, without any apparent embarrassment from out the bushes, and without noticing Greencoat, had pursued his homeward way. Later on, it is true, he had returned to the Forestry; the blue light in the gable room was still shining, like a star dimly visible through the dark trees, but the horse and his rider had vanished like a vision, the high-backed wooden chair the girl had occupied was empty, and not a sound of the monotonous murmuring in the corner was to be heard—the enigmatical doings were all over, to the relief, no doubt, of the lonely man in the house, who, by this time must be sitting by his shaded lamp alone, bending his handsome head over the book that engrossed him.

Into the fantastic web, which, despite his

clear judgment and contempt of himself, Herr Markus was unable to get free from, more threads from without were inter-weaving themselves—a Jew who had been at the Manor and had come from Tillröda about the purchase of a horse, had told about a band of gipsies, who were passing through, and had kicked up a row because they were not allowed to remain a night. They were handsome, distinguished-looking people, and their horses were noble specimens of a splendid breed. Stolen, of course, from the Hungarian steppes. Directly after this, a farm servant, on his way home, had been complaining to the steward of the rough way the Ranger treated him now-a-days, actually shutting the door in his face, and obliging him to transact his business on the high road, as if he were a tramp or a thief, and he, on his master's business—these were all strange coincidences.

Well, he should like to see her brown eyes fastened on the ground this time. He would summon all his sagacity, and control his idiotic passion, so as to be able to meet this incomprehensible girl, with a calm, clear head, if she came—and come she *must*. True, when she

had left the day before, she had been offended beyond all bounds ; still, she had said, " I will come again, and see how it is going on," and he clung to that, as to a man's word of honour. He kept the bandage on his hand, with almost nervous care, though it was irksome to him, but she should see he had waited faithfully for her.

He held out manfully, all the afternoon in the stifling glow that brooded round, and in the little pavilion. The door leading down the steps stood wide open, ready to admit the nurse, but hour after hour fled by, and the road into the wood remained still and forsaken. Not even a butterfly was to be seen fluttering about the parched white line of road, from which the heat was reflected like the glow of a furnace.

The sky still preserved its hard, unyielding aspect, something like a blue glass dome, expanded over the thirsty earth ; but the sharply defined line of the distant horizon showed signs of giving way. Softly it began to swell and rise into fantastic forms over the wide country—the first clouds that had been seen for weeks. How they spread and stretched

out their long arms into blue ether, audaciously striving to reach the fiery orb, and shroud his majesty; even so waxed the watcher's impatience. If she tarried till the storm broke loose, he should not see her that day.

He seized his hat, shut the balcony door after him, and just as he reached the road heard some one moving about at the corner of the wood. The violent beating of his heart turned out to be for nothing. 'Twas not those odious, yet so longed for "Winkers" that he saw coming along the plantation, but a little straw hat decked with blue ribbon streamers, betokening the approach of little Louisa, and her mother trotting sturdily behind her.

Frau Griebel paused mid-way.

"God be praised, it's coming at last, Herr Markus," she said, with a nod towards the rising bank of clouds. "If it really comes, that is to say a down right veritable pour—otherwise thank you—I'll bake the Tillröder urchins a cake to-morrow such as they'll remember for years to come."

She set a huge basket down in the road and wiped the perspiration from her brow.

"That was a hot walk, I can tell you,

Herr Markus, and I'd scarcely have undertaken it to please myself," she said addressing Herr Markus, who by this time had joined them: "but the new maid arrived at The Farm this afternoon, so I was obliged to go and look after her myself. And well it was I did so. The stupid wench comes from a well-to-do farmer's and is howling over the empty presses and larder, over there. I thought how it would be, and so packed up some ham and sausage and a few pots of jam in this basket, and while she was making her moan to me in the kitchen, my little girl managed to slip them into the press—well, it's none too pleasant there, it must be confessed; they've got nothing at all in the curing room—their pigs were every one seized last winter; and any one accustomed to the flesh-pots of Egypt will find a difference. Well the family ought to make up for it by kindness, but the Amtmann's conceit has infected the lot of them, like moths in fur, and there's no good to be made of them. Just as my Louisa and I got into the hall, who should appear on the steps but my lady Governess, she had twisted her grey veil round her head."



"Yes, there wasn't much of her face to be seen," put in Louisa, "but she's so tall, and looked as grand as any court lady."

"And the whole hall smelt of violets, just like my linen press at home," supplemented Frau Griebel. "And when my little goose there ventured to peer a little into her face, she wheeled round and was out of the hall before you could look round you—it's an awful thing, Herr Markus; but the pride sticks to people even when they haven't a crumb to eat or a shoe to put on. I heard the Amtmann calling after her out of the window, 'Whither away, Agnes?' 'To the forest.' 'Have you your gloves on?' Did you ever hear anything like that, Herr Markus?"

He burst into a loud laugh.

"Why on earth shouldn't the lady nurse her pretty hands; she has two maids to wait upon her now."

"Indeed, two? Well, you'll stare when you hear what I've got to tell you. You know," and she shook her finger somewhat angrily at him. "When you gathered your books together yesterday and stalked away as if the chimney was on fire, you were thinking to

yourself, 'what an old cat!' and the old cat was myself—there, there, you be quiet. I know it as well as I know my alphabet. I read it in your angry face, but I held my peace and kept my own counsel. Well, I was right after all, and another time you'll believe an honest woman's word who never told a lie in her life, in preference to a pair of sparkling black, gipsy eyes."

"What has happened?" he enquired, cutting her speech short in ill-concealed anxiety.

"Well, something that can't fail to annoy a person. But how you do look, Herr Markus. After all, what is it to us if Amtmanns choose to pack their maid off, body and bones?"

"Pack her off, did you say?"

This upset her equanimity just a little, and she looked into the young man's furious face with some consternation. "I declare you look just as if it was I, had taken the girl by the collar, and that I must deny. It would be a lie to say I ever liked her—the upsetting creature, she's not my sort, but to do her an injury or get her turned away, that's a thing I couldn't bring myself to. I only casually asked the new-comer where the other one was,

and she stared at me quite stupid and perplexed, she said the young lady had shown her all that was necessary and the old gentleman had been fidgetting about in the kitchen all the morning, and giving orders like a general officer—not another creature had she seen.”

“To the point, madam,” said Herr Markus, quivering with impatience.

“Aye, aye. I’m coming to it. When I asked afterwards inside what had become of the maid I had so often seen working in the fields, the old lady in her bed turned her face to the wall as white as a sheet, while the Amtmann grew crimson, stared at me as if he would eat me, and went on stammering and stuttering. ‘She? why she’s gone, of course; made her escape. Do you think, my good woman, I’m going to keep two such thieves, now too, when they’re tearing down this old shed and all my fine farm operations are at a stand-still.’ Only fancy, Herr Markus, his fine farming operations. The old bragger that he should fancy he could take an old hand like myself in with his flunkeyism about the two maids. No servant throughout the known world ever leaves without proper warning,

unless there's some special cause for it. Why we're not to learn the reason, I don't know, but I'll give my head for a half-penny if the medallion hasn't got something to do with it; but where are you off to so fast, Herr Markus?"

She turned round and beheld the young man following the road she had come by, like a whirlwind.

"Can you ask me, most respected Griebel?" he called back. "Can't you imagine my curiosity to see this incomparable new-comer?"

He hurried along the road as if the first faint breeze now rising, were bearing him along. His eye roamed over the meagre crops—surely the white kerchief must be hidden somewhere amongst those miserable corn-fields or behind the last hay-cocks in the nearest meadow; but no—nothing moved or stirred in all the plain. Nothing, but the long-looked-for shadows which were chasing each other like healing messengers, as heralds of the approaching storm; and a second feeble gust of wind, through the leaves of the pear tree in the Farm garden, noiselessly shook down some of the small fruit upon the pathway.

Herr Markus passed by the dark silent arbour, and walked through the raspberry bushes into the yard—there, he found noise enough. Spitz began sniffing at the gate-posts and barking, and sounds of loud scolding proceeded from the house.

On entering the hall, he beheld the Amtmann standing at the kitchen press; the old man had his stick and his pipe in one hand, while, with the other he had just locked the press with a bang that made it creak again. Thereupon he took out the key and stuck it into his dressing-gown pocket.

“Such housekeeping!” he muttered, limping into the hall and offering Herr Markus his hand, to whom he looked much like a monte-bank on the stage. “There’s a splendid sausage, and three or four pounds of the finest ham, at the least, lying open in the press there. A nice morsel for the strolling beggars that haunt the Farm. If that’s the kind of work that goes on here, no wonder, faith, that there’s a scarcity. And as for jam pots there’s a whole regiment of them standing there,” he said, scratching behind his ear. “I daren’t tell my good wife what’s going on in her larder

—and what for, goodness alone knows ; I was not aware we were going to give either a dinner or a supper when my niece comes home.”

“ Perhaps the maid could tell you something about it,” put in Herr Markus.

“ She ? ” and he pointed with his pipe to the table where the “ new-comer,” was working with a very sullen aspect. “ Why, she hasn’t been two hours in the house.”

“ I mean the other one.”

For one moment the Amtmann gazed into space as if trying to recall something ; then, he bent down to pick off a few shavings of wood that had stuck to his dressing gown.

“ Oh, that one ? ” he muttered incoherently—he had his pipe in his mouth again—“ Oh, she’s gone off, bag and baggage.” He rose erect again, but stooping made his face as red as fire. “ Won’t you come in, Herr Markus ? ” he continued. “ My wife will be delighted to see you, and I have something to say to you about the new house. I have ever so many new ideas about it. For instance, the drawing-room —— ”

“ Pray, tell me first where that maid is gone

to?" said Herr Markus interrupting him with marked courtesy, but great decision.

"That is a preposterous question, sir," replied the Amtmann—"excuse me, but what master bothers himself as to where his servants go to, once they're dismissed. I've been in the habit of paying my people their wages, and there's an end of the matter. After that, they might be dead as far as I'm concerned; what is it to me, whether or not they take another situation, or roam about the world gipsy fashion? The girl is gone, clean gone; just as if the wind had blown her away and she had never been here—aye, aye, never been here."

"But your niece who brought the girl here with her; did she too consent to this abrupt dismissal?"

The same fiery red overspread the old man's face as before. "My niece?" he repeated slowly. "Bah, what is that to me? Women's fancies come second. I'm master in this house—but, what nonsense, here are we two standing chattering, like a pair of magpies about a mere trifle. Come in. I've got a splendid idea. The parquet in the new saloon ——"

"We'll attend to that, by-and-bye," inter-

posed Herr Markus sternly. "This trifle interests me. I have my own reasons for wishing to know more about this girl, who toiled for you in the fields incessantly, in every kind of weather."

"Bah, it wasn't so bad as all that," stammered out the old man in desperation.

"Oh, very well," said Herr Markus, unable to control his impatience. "Let me see, I must appeal to the ladies' sense of justice."

He was making for the little sitting-room, but the Amtmann barred the way.

"What are you about, sir," he exclaimed. "Do you want to upset my poor sick wife, with your inquisitorial visage? The whole thing is at an end with her, as well as with me, and is not to be touched on again. What on earth are you making such a fuss for, about a young woman, who has passed away like a shadow through the house and exists no more for any of us."

"Not for Fräulein Franz either, to whom she was such a faithful servant?"

"Who has been telling you that fairy tale?" enquired the Amtmann, as he eyed him with a side-long glance of curiosity, and a sly smile



showed that a light had suddenly broken in upon him.

“The girl herself.”

“What the deuce—you have spoken to her then? And she told you herself, *she* told you, that she had specially waited on my niece.” The fatal smile would not be suppressed. “Well, well, I knew nothing about that—my wretched limbs won’t carry me up so high as the attics. A lady’s maid then.” He cackled to himself, and shrugged his shoulders. “Well, my pretty niece will have to wait on herself a while now, till she can return into the great world, or better still, till my rich boy comes home again. Things will wear another aspect then, sir. He won’t allow his beautiful cousin to stay away, no, not if she were located at a Prince’s court. We shall be monarchs ourselves then, reigning by virtue of gold. It’s not in stranger’s carriages she’ll be driving then, but in our own. Sir, I know a pair of carriage horses”—he kissed the tips of his fingers—“real beauties for spirit and breeding—but I won’t tell you where they’re to be found, for you’re quite capable of going off and buying them for me on the spot—but I have

the whole thing ready, prepared in my brain. A magnificent programme! Nobody could compete with me in that. Were my son to appear this moment on that miserable threshold, it would take me but a few days to provide him with the *entourage* befitting a man of wealth—just as if it rose by magic out of the earth ——”

He got no further. Herr Markus took off his hat, and disappeared through the doorway.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**T**IME lost! He clenched his teeth with rage and pain, as he strode across the yard out of the gate.

“See that you find your way into a place of safety, sir,” shouted the Amtmann after him. He had followed him to the door and pointed, with his pipe, to the sky where the sun had now totally disappeared behind the murky clouds. It was like a sudden eclipse over the languid earth, and a faint hot air swept round the offices, lifting the old man’s scanty white locks upon his temples. “If you meet a young woman in a grey veil, hunt her home here to The Farm,” he shouted through the hollow of his hand. “She is seeking wild flowers to paint, but the old people are watching for her anxiously at home.”

Herr Markus only just caught the last words over the wall, as he was passing by. He laughed angrily to himself. If he could only meet her, the pretty minx! Hunt her

home indeed. Just the contrary. He'd block her way, and compel her to listen to him without pity, without mercy, let it thunder or lighten, or pour torrents of rain.


The road that ran parallel with the offices led into the fields, or rather into a narrow footpath that led again to The Grafenholz—of course, the girl would have fled thither after she had been turned out of The Farm “bag and baggage,” fled into the wood, the green wood. Had not the Amtmann too, referred to gipsy life? Was there not at that moment a tiny streak of smoke curling above the tall pines, and proceeding, no doubt, from the dried faggots these Nomad tribes suspended their cauldron over? Was ever such folly—it was the clouds doing battle; sheets of grey mist, rolling now and then across the dense, black wall of storm that was gathering.

A gipsy tent would hardly be allowed to camp in His Highness's well-cared hunting grounds. But then, the high road was free—the road through the cool, fresh, beechen shade, out into the wide wide world was open to that wandering caravan, led by its bronzed

escort. Well, such a pilgrimage as that could be accomplished but slowly, these homeless people delight in roaming, and a rapid traveller could overtake them soon enough and easily discover whether or not the linen awning sheltered the lovely enigma, once more caught in the toils that bind these lawless folk together. The Amtmann had kept repeating the word "Folly," and Herr Markus said the same thing, as he kicked a pebble out of his way in a rage and shook his head, Folly. A demure, retiring, naughty girl like that, amongst those half naked savages; roaming the world with such a set of rogues and witch-like beings! How was it possible that such crazy ideas could keep perpetually recurring to a man in his sound mind.

He quickened his pace. At the Ranger's house he was *sure* to find some explanation, and if the girl was gone, then—he would shake the dust off his feet and pursue her without ceasing till he found her.

The green shimmer of the burning sun amongst the beech trees was suddenly extinguished—dark and still the wood awaited the approaching storm, as if, in common with



everything living or breathing, it held its breath. The intense heat of the last few days had penetrated into its heart. The narrow path, usually so damp, looked bleached; the patches of grass along the side, burnt up; the ferns were drooped and sapless; the brook too, that meandered through it was all but dried up — the loose plank laid across its bed, seemed a mere mockery.

Herr Markus crossed it. To the right, lay the thicket, leading on in a straight line; but to the left, the narrow green valley running under the hill, took a curve up to where the Forestry stood. At some little distance was the high road, and further on still, the red tiles of the lonely house appeared in view.

On reaching this point, Herr Markus paused in utter amazement. The midnight rider had just come out on the door-steps, and was in the act of mounting his horse, which the keeper was holding for him. The stately old gentleman, in his summer paletôt, with his short grey hair and chamois gloves, would have been highly gratified with the rôle of Gipsy chieftain assigned to him. He rode off at a sharp trot, Mosje Dachs preceding

him, and the keeper by his side. A few moments more, and they had disappeared in the wood.

What now? Herr Markus's first idea was to hurry after them—Greencoat was the *one* individual who could give him any tidings of the girl—but he soon abandoned that as impossible—he could hardly waylay a man in such evident haste, and demand an explanation from him, on the road side. Just then, he noticed a cat steal down the door-steps and walk quietly across the road—the door must be open, which showed there was some one in the house. He crept under the windows; the blue blinds were still down, but the door was ajar, and Herr Markus did not hesitate to open it stealthily and go in. There were no windows in the hall, it was cool and dark, but the dining-room lay on the right, and was wide open, probably on account of the heat, and from it streamed a bluish light into the dim apartment.

An unpleasant sensation seized him at that moment—he seemed to himself like a thief who had succeeded in stealing into the heart of this suspected dwelling. How should he

give any sufficient reason for his presence, on first meeting the savages? Nevertheless, he closed the hall door behind him, and paused a moment to take observations.

Deadly silence reigned throughout the house and the dim light, at first, rendered every object indistinct, but only for a moment—in the next he had made a startling discovery. Miss Governess was there—there in that very house. There, on the table, lay the grey veil and gloves which had so much upset the good Griebel's peace of mind. Ah! the bird was caught! A sense of triumph, of coming vengeance, sprung up within him. Now was the moment to unveil this "Bild von Sais". This cruel egotist should rue and repent her conduct. She it was who should herself assist him to regain the girl whom she had dragged with her into want and privation, merely to leave her to her fate in the end.

With quick decision Herr Markus advanced to the sitting-room door, but a sight met him which made him pause and involuntarily retreat into the hall. In the opposite corner of the room—the very spot whence had issued those monotonous tones the evening before—



stood a bed, and in it lay a sleeper. Was it the bluish twilight which lent such an unearthly pallor to that quiet countenance, or had death already set his seal there? It was difficult to decide. And the man standing near the hall-door was not thinking about that either—he was gazing at the rich auburn beard, spread out on the coloured quilt. How came the man he and Frau Griebel had so recently picked up off the high road, and harboured for a night at the Manor, how came he here, and how long had this secluded nook been his refuge, causing Herr Markus such fearful perplexity. Above all, what business had Miss Governess here; the conceited, spoilt woman of the world, by the sick bedside of a strolling beggar?

A slight rustling, the sound of a woman's dress sweeping over the floor, caused him to retreat still further into the dusk, he wished to get some idea of the detested Attic-Maiden's ways and doings before confronting her. She must have come out of a side door, probably the kitchen, and would, most likely, stop a moment at the table. A sharp but rapidly hushed clinking of glasses caught his ear;

then, the skirt swept on, and the lady came within the listener's range of vision.

The slight, graceful figure had its back to him. He saw the beautifully arranged back hair; rich, dark plaits, from which a curl or two had escaped behind the ear; saw a hand stretched out to raise the skirt of her dress gracefully—strange—he had only seen this young lady once in the twilight, appearing like a shadow beside her uncle, he had never in his life spoken to her, and yet he felt as if he had known her for years.

She bent down over the sleeper and listened to his breathing; a fly, that was buzzing round his pillow, was chased away; finally she turned round, and the watcher in the hall stood transfixed—*comme il faut* as any lady, she might be, a wealth of curls might adorn her brow, elegant attire set off the form so long disfigured and disguised by the working dress and voluminous folds of apron, but for all that, she was Amtmann's maid, every inch of her, as she stood with down cast eyes and meditative air. It seemed as if scales had suddenly fallen from his eyes, and his breath was gone with sheer amazement. How dis-

gracefully had he allowed himself to be mystified. Pitted against such finesse, he had played the part of the honest, simple-minded German Michel, believing just what lay before him, without looking to the right hand or the left. Just a soupçon more of the wit mother nature bestows on us and he would easily have solved the Sphinx's riddle; for mingled with the bitter truth, a pretty archness had been played off on him, as he saw now. The "Bild von Sais" had, needs must, remained behind the veil in her attic chamber while Fräulein Franz donned the working garb, to earn the bread of the unfortunate old people. "Inseparable, one heart and one soul:" such were Miss Governess and Amtmann's maid, as he had been told in strictest verity, and if the truth had failed to strike him, that this "double" possessed one and the same head—that lovely, expressive head he was watching now from his place of concealment—surely, none but a silly, simple old fellow, like himself, could have been capable of such obtuseness.

Mingled anger and admiration, a longing for revenge, yet tender solicitude on her behalf

struggled in his heart for the mastery, and he thanked his stars which had kept him hidden in the shadow of the hall. It gave him time to collect himself—Miss Governess should not have the triumph of witnessing his discomfiture; she should not even detect a vestige of surprise in his face. Without observing him, she passed the open door and he was able to bend forward to watch her movements at the table. She peeled a lemon and threw the rind into a glass of toast-water; then, he discovered the reason why the pretty niece might not go out without gloves. The aged blusterer at The Farm was doing his best to conceal that “a Franz, the daughter of an officer of high rank,” had been obliged to stoop to menial work, and the most likely thing to betray it, were the berry-brown hands there, from which the traces of hard work could not be so easily obliterated.

Just then the storm broke loose. It thrilled through the air like a trumpet-call, waking up a majestic surging and swaying amongst the tree-tops, but it shook the windows also and rattled at the hall-door as if it would blow it in. The young lady standing at the table

listened to it and cast an anxious glance at the sleeper ; but he never moved a muscle. His was evidently the sleep of utter exhaustion.

Meanwhile, Herr Markus had noiselessly advanced somewhat nearer ; he had completely regained his self-possession, and as she returned to her occupation, reassured, her eye fell on him, as hat in hand, he stood in the doorway.

She gave a perceptible start ; knife and lemon both fell from her hand, but she recovered herself with incredible rapidity ; her stature seemed to grow under his very eyes. Drawn up to her full height, she moved away from the table, passed Herr Markus by, and opening the door of the opposite room, said, in a courteous but rather faint tone :

“ Walk in, Sir, pray. You are seeking shelter from the coming storm.”

He suppressed a smile. “ Fräulein Franz,” he enquired, interrupting her with an obeisance as cool and reserved as if it were his first interview with the lady.

“ Yes, Sir. I am the Amtmann’s niece— Agnes Franz,” her eyes where fixed on the ground and the blood mounted to her fore-

head. "The Governess," she added, in a sharp, decided tone. She looked up and her eyes shone with the evident struggle between embarrassment and angry defiance.

He took no notice of it; he was quite at his ease.

Pausing at the door he said by way of excuse. "I have no idea of awaiting the outbreak of the storm here; I don't think much of a wetting, and very probably, may have to make a journey of several hours, just as I am. I'm in search of a young girl, a Sister of Mercy, who bandaged this up for me yesterday," and he showed his right hand. "The Amtmann tells me she is gone, never to return. Is that true, Fräulein Franz? Is she gone?"

She avoided his searching gaze, and answered unsteadily. "Her aid and services are no longer needed, you yourself provided a substitute."

"So then she is gone, without remembering she had her pledged word to fulfil—yesterday, she said:—'I will come again to-morrow, and see how it is going on.' You must know, I regarded that, as sacred as a word of honour, as reliable as Holy Writ. Well, there I waited

patiently, through all these broiling hours this afternoon, still expecting the maiden in the working dress and the white coif upon her head, would appear at any moment round the corner of the wood. I have never touched the bandage, fearing I might loosen it, and draw down a reproof from my Sister of Charity, but she's gone off, it seems, out into the wide world as if the wind had blown her away: so says the Herr Amtmann at least. What am I to do?"

"Allow me to discharge that given promise," she said, stretching out her hand for his, while a shy, half comic glance met his own—he never moved a muscle.

"Thanks," he replied, drawing back. "I can't accept that offer: the bandage must remain the way it is, until I meet my kind physician again. I've already told you, that I mean to follow her, and hope you'll have the humanity to give me some hint as to how I may find her ——"

"No," she said, interrupting him abruptly, and turning away. "I will never do that."

"That is hard, unchristian, and narrow-minded. What advantage has that sick vaga-

bond, lying on the bed yonder, over me, that he should be nursed so carefully, while you deny me the information that would prove my cure?"

She turned deadly pale and shut the door carefully, which had hitherto been only closed.

"Yes, a vagabond indeed," she replied with down-cast eyes. "A man who doesn't own the very pillow on which he has passed through his deadly sickness. It is a bitter thing to have crossed the sea amidst countless difficulties and dangers, in search of gold, only to return at last, poor as Job, and reach the threshold of home, to sink down upon the doorstep in the exhaustion of death. He longed to work and save up, out there, for his mother. He knew well the day would come when she would be left without the necessaries of life, deprived of every comfort, so he tore himself away, while he thought there was yet time. Most people would have disappeared for ever, on the wreck of all their hopes—but he could not do that—the longing to see his old mother drove him home. And now, he has been a prisoner here, not a stone's throw from her sick bed ——"



“Is it he the Amtmann talks of?” interposed Herr Markus, with baited breath.

She bent her head silently, in the affirmative.

He felt strangely moved. That, then, was the Nabob. Only a few moments before, the old man had been talking in his pretentious way of himself and his son as ‘rulers by virtue of gold’; he had been so proud of his programme, which, with the Californian gold, was to convert this wilderness into an Eden on the spot. And though it may well be imagined that this born bragger, scarcely himself believed in his own bold dreams, yet, it was heart-rending to think that “the vagrant with the objectionable beard,” on whom he had bestowed a half-penny, and a hunch of bread at his own gate, was his own flesh and blood, his rich youngster.

And, as the centre of this domestic drama, stood a girl as courageous as she was sensible, who with childlike fidelity had bared her own bosom to receive all the enemy’s darts. She had taken everything upon her own shoulders; the fearful load of work, providing their daily bread, the care of the two helpless old people

—and now, here was another added, that she must keep secret. She had only been able to slip over to him surreptitiously. With what a beating heart, must she have left the Farm at nights to take up her watch here; and it was when employed on this labour of love, Frau Griebel had met, and so cruelly condemned her.

He watched her standing at the door with bowed head, and would fain have kissed her feet, but at that moment there was nothing for it, but to keep down the tempest in his breast. She was justly offended and incensed, this despised governess. An incautious step towards one so deeply wounded, would cut him off from the desired goal for ever—her whole demeanour expressed this plainly.

“Is your cousin likely to live?” he enquired, carefully controlling his voice and features.

“Thank God, yes. The doctor who left this a few minutes ago, has pronounced him out of danger. Yesterday evening, we got a fright—the delirium had taken a critical turn.” That, then, had been the mysterious sound in the corner, and jealousy had metamorphosed

the simple country doctor into a gipsy bandit. "We nurses, for a moment, felt all the weight of our responsibility then," she continued, much moved. "For the first, at least, we had thought it better to conceal Otto's return, in such miserable circumstances, from his parents, but, if it had come to dying," she paused, overcome by the recollection of the fearful dilemma they had so nearly been exposed to, and the distant thunder was heard muttering through the sudden silence, while a shower of heavy rain-drops pattered against the window-panes.

"The storm is coming and the Ranger is on his way to the Tillröder Apothecary's," she said anxiously.

"And two old people looking out nervously for a young lady who is gathering wild flowers in the wood."

She looked at him steadily with flashing eyes, and shrugged her shoulders with a bitter smile.

"What can it matter," she said lightly, "if the petted, lazy fingers, that are so fond of intruding their painted nosegays and musical exercises on other people, should, for once,

get a thorough good wetting from a thunder storm?"

Herr Markus bit his lip and watched the rain as it fell in torrents.

"That's just what I think too," he said, after a moment's pause turning to her quite composedly; "but I don't see what right you have to apply that remark to those sun-burnt fingers there," and he pointed to her hands which were clasped round the door-handle.

"No: pretty they certainly are not," she said archly, and dancing them up before her face. "My uncle too, has been very particular all this afternoon that I shouldn't appear in the dear, old wood again, without my gloves."

"He thinks a great deal of appearances, of his name?"

She laughed a hard laugh.

"Little he knows, *how* low the name has sunk. The Franzs have wrecked their every hope and—a governess in the family—

"And—what I consider far worse, an ugly, revengeful, unforgiving element in their blood," he added, his temper rising. He

seized his hat which was lying on a table near.

“You’re not thinking of going out in such weather,” she said timidly.

“Why not? What harm can it do ‘a rich man like the one in the Bible,’ if the rain pours on his head? The air in this house is stifling me, making my blood boil. I’d a thousand times rather brave the elements than face narrow-heartedness and resentment here. Have you forgotten that I came here with the sole purpose of finding my maiden—pardon me, my dear physician, I mean—but she is not here, the brave, noble, large-hearted girl, who couldn’t endure to have given me pain and with heroic self-denial came to me.”

“She did nothing but her duty,” she interposed with quivering lips, defiant mien and heightened colour. “You are quite right; you’ll never find the girl in the working dress here. She’s not to be found any where. Didn’t she tell you that she and I are one heart and soul? How could she fail then to resent, as I do, to feel with me, that no girl with any sense of self-respect could ever forget or forgive being charged with the most odious

of offences—fishing for men's hearts. Nobody knows better than I do, the struggle she had with herself at the foot of the steps leading to you."

"But she came, for all that, and acted as every true woman should, with the tender heart, not the selfish understanding, that exacts an eye for an eye—to doubt that heart were a sin I would not for worlds be guilty of, and therefore I tell you—deny me the kind, self-forgetful maiden, as you will inside these four strange walls—she *will* return, because she has to carry out her Samaritan task, on me—" and he showed his bound up hand.

"You forget I offered ——"

"And you, that I rejected that assistance most decidedly—I will wait till my dear physician remembers her patient—and now, in God's name, forth I go—perhaps I may find some trace of her in the wood."

"You cannot possibly leave the house at present."

"Because of the storm? See, just now, there is not a drop falling."

It was true, the raging of the storm had suddenly subsided; but it was only a pause,

as a wrestler halts to take a long deep breath, to gain fresh power. Suddenly it grew dark as night; as if the roof of the house, and the tops of the trees were about to be crushed in.


Herr Markus glanced at the fingers holding the door handle, and made a slight inclination, but they did not move.

“Don’t go,” came from those lips, in a tone as soft and as entreating as when the day before they had uttered, “Do be good”. His eyes flashed fire. “I will stay if you wish it,” he replied, with studied reserve of manner. “I quite understand your feeling afraid alone in the storm.”

“I’m not so silly,” she replied angrily. “From childhood upward, I have loved far more than I have hated a thunder-storm.”

“Then, I fail to understand your wish. If the Sister of Charity had said it, I should have known it was out of anxiety for me, just as she came yesterday on my account.”

“You mistake. Has she not already told you, that she took such an unheard of step entirely from conscientious motives, and from a desire to do her duty.” She threw back



her head with an air of intense pride and defiance.

“Is that really meant for bitter earnest? Have you really the heart to rob me of my fond illusion, because I judged a calling and those who filled it, superficially and lightly?”

She looked down, and let go the door-handle.

“Can’t you find a gentler word to dismiss me with?”

It was easy to see the conflict of her feelings; but her lips remained tight shut, and the white face grew rigid in the expression of unyielding opposition as she moved away from the door.

“Well then, I must submit to the bitterest disappointment of my life, and go,” he said, as he opened the door, and crossed the hall.

He had totally forgotten the invalid’s existence, and that he ought to hush his quick loud step—probably it was his shutting the door, and the sound of his footsteps on the pavement, which startled the sleeper from his slumbers.

“Agnes,” was called out by a weak, imploring voice in the corner.



Herr Markus watched the girl fly into the other room, noted the antagonism with herself, which detained her in the hall, and made her follow him with anxious eyes, till he succeeded in getting the door shut in the teeth of the raging storm.

## CHAPTER XVII.

IT needed all his somewhat remarkable strength, to enable him to breast the violence of the storm that assailed him on leaving the doorsteps. It looked badly above, and around him. The heavy, black mass of clouds overhead were charged with hail and lightning; the brooding fury which drove them along in a ball, might at any moment play the trick of up-rooting one of the forest giants, as if it were a flower-stem, and hurling it at the helpless earth-worm straying there.

It had been safer, certainly, within the four red walls, and anyone else with a cool head and normal pulse would probably have returned thither—but *he* would not have done that for anything on earth. The game was in his own hands now—no better ally could he have had than this fierce battle of the elements. A smile stole round his lips; slight, imperceptible, the reflection of his soul.

Thus he struggled along a considerable part

of the high-road, till suddenly a flash of lightning followed by such a terrific peal of thunder as one never hears, save in a closed-in narrow valley, made him pause. Herr Markus stood for one moment stunned, as if the lightning had struck at his feet and dazed him; the storm made a momentary lull as if itself appalled, but the sulphuric light still seemed to shine, and torrents of rain, as if released from bondage, came down in plashing fury, bringing with it a shower of small cones.

Herr Markus dashed across the meadow up the slope. There he knew he should find a little shed, a kind of shelter for the forest workmen, half covered by the thicket that grew under the pines. In a few moments he had reached this primitive shelter. It consisted of four walls, formed out of rough boulders of stone loosely thrown together, and a roof made of pine logs, so that unless the teeming rain succeeded in loosening the moss, stopping up the crevices, any one seeking shelter was safe, at all events, from wind and weather.

He made his way to the back of the little shed and watched the fury of the storm, awe-

struck by its power—there it was, at last, what clergy and congregation had both been praying for so earnestly ; the precious streaming floods filling the dried-up tissues of the plants, giving promise of a fruitful harvest and a plenty of bread. But what a frightful struggle it cost nature to pour it forth !

The forked tongues of flame quivered and flashed so appallingly in every direction, the deafening peals of thunder were so incessant, one could almost fancy that the Greek god of old had let his thunder-bolts loose, it sounded as if the claps that made the earth rock must end in tearing asunder those rocky defiles which had stood immovable for centuries past—then, the rolling floods descending, transformed the level plain in one moment into a vast lake ; they filled the dried-up bed of the little brook and rushed on, a muddy river, into the valley, tearing up stones, up-rooting trees, and finally carrying off the loose plank that acted as bridge, with them—would this, he wondered, be sufficient to satisfy his honest Griebel ?

The spot, covered by those four walls, remained intact, the water running down the steep incline on either side, the roof too held

out bravely. The lower branches of the saturated pines kept beating indeed against the creaking joints, but they warded off the first attack of the rain, and it was only when the storm succeeded in penetrating and shaking the mighty stems as if they were reeds, that a positive shower-bath ensued, accompanied by such deafening fury, that sight and hearing alike forsook the shelterer in the corner.

It was a regular forest thunder-storm. A raging monster, a caged wild beast ! It could not escape beyond the mountains, it must rage till exhausted—how long it lasted, how intolerably long !

Herr Markus began at last to pace up and down the narrow space, burning with restlessness and impatience. At last, however, it showed signs of clearing, the thunder grew fainter, the rain moderated, other sounds of life began to venture forth ; the twittering of birds, the rustling of little animals among the dripping branches, and faint murmurs from human habitations began to be heard once more. The distant sound of wheels was also audible, it advanced nearer and nearer on the high road and stopped for a moment, no doubt at

the red house. Then it moved along again heavily over the sodden ground, and appeared at last round a corner from whence Herr Markus could see it. It was a truck-waggon, which had probably picked the Ranger up and set him down at his own house.

Ah then, Green-coat was at home again, and the nurse would be emancipated. Now was the moment, if any trace of fear or anxiety for one exposed to that awful storm, lurked within her breast, little would she heed the pelting rain or swimming ground—she would use her liberty, make her escape from the imperious duties of nursing, and come.

And she did come. Came like one escaped from prison—veil, gloves, parasol, all forgotten in the Ranger's house. She had gathered her dress up over her arm; the slender, nimble feet sped along the road, while her head kept turning in every direction, as if in search of something—did she expect to see anyone struck by lightning, lying in the road?

Herr Markus crept out of the shed and crouched down in the copse. She could see into the shed from below and must needs find it empty. Hastily scanning it she hurried

on, and struck into the narrow pathway, leading through the wood to The Hirschwinkel.

Of course she could not tell that the road there had become impassible. She paused and recoiled before the broad foaming flood into which the quiet little stream, just running like a thread through the valley, had suddenly been swollen—not a plank far or near. She ran along the bank, in despair, seeking some shallow spot to wade through.

Meanwhile Herr Markus had crept down the slope, across the soft spongy meadow; he stood behind her just as she was gathering her petticoats together to step into the water—quick as thought he passed his arm round her, and raised her from the ground.

She gave a cry—her face, which lay half fainting on his shoulder was disfigured by tears and alarm, but it brightened now with an air of relief.

“I’m not doing this as my duty to my neighbour,” he whispered with a laugh, in her ear, as he bore her through the water. “By no means, I’m no such philanthropist. I am doing it for your sake alone.”

On the other side, he set her gently down. "You have hurt yourself," she said, grasping at his bandaged hand, because he had moved away rapidly.

"I have not hurt myself," he said, with a double meaning. Any unconcerned person must have observed the hidden mischief lurking in his eyes—but she, in her great excitement, never noticed it. "Possibly, there may be something there, under the bandage, out of gear, but what of that? My robust constitution will set that all right—and now go home as fast as possible. I know the old people are devoured with anxiety at the flower-gatherer's absence—but, your uncle will be in a rage at seeing you without gloves. Shall I fetch them?" and he made as though he would return to The Forestry.

She shook her head in the negative, and the shadow of a smile began to dawn on her tear-stained features.

"And the hat has been left behind too," he said. "The rain-drops are glistening like dew-drops in your hair, and will give you cold. Well, that flimsy grey veil would'nt have been much use—better far the coif, the dear white



coif, my kind physician wore—and now farewell.”

With these words he sprung back into the foaming waters, and waded off without once turning his head. He crossed the meadow and made for the high road. The intricate and romantic path through the underwood was inaccessible to-day. But he particularly wished to avoid the road the flower-gatherer had taken, so that he had no alternative but to make a *détour* past The Forestry, and go round by a distant but good road, the same Frau Griebel had appeared by on the occasion of their first meeting.

He got over the ground rapidly, he was in a hurry. The rain had ceased, but the wood was dripping and if he knocked by accident against a bough, a perfect shower-bath overwhelmed him—that one awful hour had supplied copious floods of water. The soft, mossy sward was cut up in pools, and the tiny stream that turned the saw-mill, now overflowing its boundaries, rushed impetuously down the valley.

The miller himself was standing on the bank with a face of glee. “It has rained

bread to-day, Herr Markus," he called out to the passer-by. "The hungry creatures in the wood will be well off now—the potato crop will be a fine one this year. Aye, that's the kind of scourge I like," said the farmer, drawing a breath of deep content, as he stretched his arms out towards the swimming, glistening country.

In the hall, Frau Griebel actually ran into his arms coming out of the store-room, with two large bags in her hand.

"Well, Herr Markus, what do you say to weather like that?" she said, poking him in the ribs. "That rumbling and thundering was another story, wasn't it, to anything you have in that big platter of your's at home? Look you, we couldn't do without an uproar like that; we're accustomed to it here, and as for me, I like listening to it, as much as to the organ in the church. And here they are now, in good earnest"—she showed him the paper-bags—"the extra raisins that I'm going to bake in the Tillröder urchin's cake—the rain was too splendid."

"The very thing—plum cake! and I'll add the wine. Can you make good wedding cake too?" With these words, Herr Markus seized

the portly little dame round the waist, and took two or three turns with her.

“Wedding cake!” she repeated, panting, and with a suspicious glance. “Where on earth have you been, Herr Markus, that you come home so merry? And you’re just as wet as a poodle. And, my goodness, mud on my beautifully fresh scrubbed boards. Get away with you; dancing too, if you please, with half the Hirschwinkel sticking to your boots. A fine fuss, Hannah ’ll make at having to begin her scouring all over again. Wedding cake, did you say? Oh, I can make them fast enough, light and high, that it’ll melt in your mouth—but may I ask for whom, in our quiet Hirschwinkel? Who’s to eat it?”

“Who? Why anyone that likes, anyone that wishes to be my guest. Old and young, rich and poor—all are invited, when a man finds a treasure he must not be niggardly of his thanks.” He laughed audaciously in her astonished face, and ran up the stairs singing George Brown’s song “Komm, O holde Dame,” in a fine baritone voice. “Sag’ an, wie ist dein Name,” reverberated through the echoing passages, then the door upstairs was shut.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

**I**N a short time he came down again, and passed through the hall. He had changed his dress, and smoothed his rich hair which had been soaked by the rain. He looked imposing, almost solemn.

“My word, almost like a bridegroom!” exclaimed Frau Griebel from the kitchen. “But the whole garden is dripping still, and in another few minutes that fine coat of yours will be as bad as the other one, Herr Markus. And I suppose I’m expected to swim over with all my crockery to the garden-house?”

He explained that he wished for dinner at eight o’clock in his own room upstairs, and that until then he did not wish anyone to intrude on him, not even that most careful of foster-mothers—herself. Thereupon he hurried away, as if he had to make up for lost time.

In the pavilion he was met by the concentrated heat of the whole afternoon. As he threw open the door to admit the fresh air he

shook his head with a grave smile. It was barely two hours since he had left it, intending to go as far as the wood, not a step further; but what is human will pitted against destiny? Well, well, there had been trouble enough to make him understand. He had needed to be driven and shaken, to be hunted into the forest where the solution awaited him in loveliest form. He had been standing outside a closed door beating his head obstinately against it; his small amount of imagination had actually led him off amongst the gipsies, while the natural common-sense view had utterly escaped his simplicity. True, he was not the only one deceived—every soul in the Hirschwinkel firmly believed that the worker in the field was none other than the Amtmann's new maid. They had all assisted in his craze, and the only person cognisant of the true state of affairs had been the most desirous of all to confirm him in his error—he had simply ignored the self-sacrificing niece in her working dress, the old mountebank had!

Now all was changed. Those menacing thunder-bolts above had discharged in blessings, the fast closed door had been thrown open wide,

yet still he was pacing up and down, as scarce two hours before in the same state of intolerable suspense—the oppressive heat which, previous to the storm had been so unbearable, was gone. Everything possessed of life or motion was astir with reinvigorated powers, and the pure light air bore every sound distinctly to the ear. Under the roof of the garden-house the unfledged little ones in their nest were piping shrilly after the parent birds, who were flying busily to and fro, swarms of midges were dancing about, and the white butterflies were abroad again, floating like snow-flakes over the fields.

Yonder too, at the corner of the plantation, a white object might come fluttering by at any moment. It *must*, it *should* be so, unless indeed he had let the lucky moment pass just to stake his all upon one venture. Suppose he had deceived himself? Suppose she had accepted his farewell in the Grafenholz in the same spirit of pride and defiance as she had done before, and that their paths should never cross again? The bare idea sent the blood rushing to his head, and in another moment

he was standing outside on the balcony steps, but he did not need to go one step further.

He shaded his eyes with his trembling hand, from the red-gold splendour of the sun now breaking forth, and gazed eagerly into the distant copse—something was certainly moving behind the pine needles and advancing ever nearer—this time it was none of the blue ribbon streamers belonging to a straw hat, which had drawn down such bitter denunciations from him that afternoon, but a coarse, ugly, white kerchief, an invention for disfiguring the human head, that was just appearing amongst the last row of dwarf pines—a wild shout of joy, which he could scarcely suppress, rose to his lips, while his heart beat to bursting.

He hurried back into the pavilion, just as she turned the corner. Her loose, white sleeves were blown about by the breeze that met her there, and it seemed almost to embrace her slender form, and render her steps unsteady. She wore her shabby working dress; the large blue check apron sat out in well starched folds about her waist, and the lines of the bust were lost beneath the clumsy handkerchief, which

was crossed in thick folds upon her breast and tied behind her back. The winkers, however, were drawn even further than usual, over the face.

On she came timidly, like one scared; at first, the sight of the pavilion and its open door, seemed to rob her of all courage, and inspire her with a desire to turn and flee; that was a critical moment, and while his destiny stood thus hanging in the balance, the man's heart beat to suffocation, but the dangerous moment passed by, the Samaritan pity conquered, and drove the girl on step by step.

He could not help thinking of the morning she had passed by there, so unconcernedly: then, the solitary figure had stood out in the early morning sunlight, as on a golden background—now, the purple glow of evening flooded the saturated plains. Even so, the morning, which had been one of such pain and longing, such wrestling and storming, ought now, must now set in a glow. In those days his presumption and untamed love of freedom, had placed him on a war-footing with the girl's pride and independence; now, he was the victim. Yet, even now, was not the timid deer running into the toils.



Buried in the furthest corner of the sofa, he never moved, and scarcely dared to draw his breath. He felt as if at that moment the happiness of his life was hanging on a thread—a bird suddenly twittering in the hedge-row, a field mouse running across the path, some accidental noise at the Manor House might frighten away the timid maiden, and scare away his wild bird, never to return—the nearer she came, the more violently did his pulses throb. She looked up at the open door with an almost imploring air, as if hoping somebody would come to her assistance—but, he knew better than that, not for anything would he have given her a helping hand. He wanted to taste all the sweetness of the position—she must come of her own free-will, must be driven under his very eyes, by her own inner impulse. She disappeared for a moment—she was passing under the garden-house; he could hear the rough-bearded corn brush her woollen dress as she passed by; then, a slow, hesitating step shook the balustrade slightly, and there she was, standing at the balcony door, leaning against the side, as

if out of breath and exhausted. He sprang up and advanced to meet her.

"I have kept my word," she murmured half to herself.

Her eyes were still fixed, with a nervous quiver on the cornfields, and she did not let the railing go.

"I knew you would," he said.

She looked up at him with a glance of pained anger. "Yes, you were sure of your game after your experience in Governesses," she replied, drawing down the white coif still deeper over her face, as a kind of protection against him and the whole world. Her tone and this gesture showed him how far he was from the desired goal.

"I knew my kind physician would not have the heart to let a fellow-creature suffer unaided," he said, with great reserve and stepping aside to allow of her entering. She passed him at once and went over to the table, where she unpacked her basket with the bandage.

He avoided even looking at her as he approached her—nothing but the greatest calm and composure could restore the self-possession she was struggling to regain. He saw that

every nerve was quivering, that her hands were vainly endeavouring to arrange the bandages. "How awkward," she murmured, putting her hand to her head. "I don't know how it is—but the air here seems to oppress me—what a miserable creature I am, to be sure."

She untied the handkerchief under her chin, with feverish impatience, and threw it back to enable her to breathe more freely; then, she seized his bandaged hand without looking up.

"Your torment will soon be ended," he said, in a tone intended to be calm, but which his own emotion rendered half unintelligible. She did not answer, but began unrolling the linen.

"Well, I have been spared that, at all events, your wound is none the worse," she said, looking up relieved. "It is healing nicely, and the scar will scarcely be perceptible."

"I'm sorry for that—I should have taken the same pride in it, that a student does in a good slash across his face. That means too, that surgical treatment is no longer necessary, doesn't it?"

"Not mine, at all events," she replied,

unrolling a fresh strip of linen with dexterous hands. "Frau Griebel can easily do anything further that may be required."

"You are very kind. Well, I suppose, I must resign myself to the worthy Griebel's manipulations, or perhaps I might seek instructions at the Farm?"

"That would be a fruitless journey," she replied, without ever looking up from her work. She moved away—her task was accomplished.

She gathered her things together in hot haste and stuffed them into the basket. Before he was aware of it, she had slipped past him and was out of the door, like a bird escaped from bondage. Not until she was on the balcony, with one foot already on the second step, did she turn round.

"Are you satisfied now, with the self-sacrifice you have wrung from me?" she enquired, subdued pain and bitter defiance mingling in her tones. "If all Samaritan works bore such a humiliating sting in them, then——"

"Why torment yourself and me with this kind of small malice, which does not even

come from your heart," he broke in. He had seized his hat, and was now standing beside her. "I certainly stood on my rights—who can blame me; and you simply fulfilled your promise. Is there anything so dreadful in that? And now I intend to escort you chivalrously—oh, protest away as much as you like. I daresay you're not aware that The Hirschwinkel is swarming with gipsies."

"Indeed? Then, they might take me with them and make me dance on the tight rope," she said, turning to him with a half smile, as he followed her down the steps.

"Well, if not on the tight rope, under their linen tents; amongst old hags and savage youngsters have I seen you already to-day; but I'll tell you about that another time; that is to say," he said, correcting himself, "if the sun of your favour ever rises in the attic, over a poor fellow like me; not much prospect of it certainly so far, and as I know that in another half hour Amtmann's maid, with the white coif and working dress will disappear for ever, I must take the best use I can of this brief moment." She surveyed him with a rapid side glance—he had grown very grave and his

pace slackened. They had reached the copse and were both walking in the centre of the road, for the long-bearded pines were still dripping with rain and the brushwood was bespangled with myriads of diamond-like drops. These brilliant reflectors, the ears of corn powdered with rain, the innumerable little pools by the roadside, one and all mirrored back the red glow of evening light—earth and sky, sun and water, all seemed to blend forgivingly, after the uproar of the storm.

“And what do you think young Franz intends doing after his recovery?” enquired Herr Markus without any further preamble. “He surely won’t return to California?”

She shook her head in the negative. “He’d rather break stones on the road. He told me so the very first hour of his return. He told me too how you had taken pity on him and given him a night’s shelter at your house, but that shame and misery had prevented his remaining there—he felt that he would rather die and moulder by the wayside than be a pensioner on the bounty of strangers, and I can understand that, understand it only too

well," she said, breaking off, and pressing her hands to her bosom. "He was right, a lonely death is not to be compared to the bitterness of living under the constant pressure of humiliating dependence."

She was silent for a few moments. With knitted brow and compressed lips she gazed up into the glowing sky, and the man standing at her side did not venture to interrupt this wrathful silence by a single word.

"He dragged himself along through the wood, and even further," she continued, after drawing a deep breath, "till at last he tottered into my arms at the Farm gate."

"And is it possible you managed to carry him away?"

"Fear gave me strength—he *must* be removed from his parents' vicinity. The old lady would have died at the mere sight of his heart-rending condition."

"It is a far distance to The Forestry."

"That day it seemed to me endless, but when there I found an efficient help in the Ranger; he, good honest fellow, was Otto's early friend and playfellow, he laughed and cried in one breath at the melancholy sight;

not many hours after that the poor fellow lay in high fever —— ”

“ And in his delirium made the woods re-sound again,” put in Herr Markus in a subdued voice, “ and people who heard those frantic yells outside mistook them for the shouts of revellers carousing in the gable-room. I remember, and the devotion of a man’s life could hardly suffice to obliterate the memory of the harsh words then spoken, which must have so keenly wounded a noble heart.”

She turned away her frightened face, and looked as if she contemplated breaking through the dripping copse at their side, and making her way through it.

This gesture must have escaped her companion’s observation, for he asked her just then with as much coolness as though he had never diverged a hair’s breadth from the subject, “ What profession did your cousin belong to, before he set off on the gold quest ? ”

“ He was a farmer,” she replied, making the best of her way along, and avoiding the branches that hung weighted with rain drops across the path. “ Originally, he was destined to be his father’s successor on the Gel-



sungen estates, but all ideas of that kind were given up long ago, and now that his every hope is wrecked, his prospects are naturally very unassuming. Some simple mode of life by which he could securely earn his daily bread—were it by the severest toil, or in the most secluded corner of the earth—that, and to be able to live with his old mother, is his sole ambition now.'

"Then he may remain at the Hirschwinkel."

She stopped again and looked up at him with a delighted expression. "Would you let the Farm *to him?*"

He looked away and answered: "The disposal of it is not in my power".

"Not in your power," she repeated mechanically, and breathless from amazement. She had turned quite pale. "Have you sold the Hirschwinkel then?"

"What are you thinking of? Sell my gem which has brought me such unmerited blessings? No, rather far give the Markus establishment to the hammer. The matter stands thus—for the last year and upwards the Farm has ceased to belong to the Hirschwinkel."

“And you had no right over it, and the old people are to be left once more without a roof to their heads! How cruel!” and she let her head sink upon her bosom like one completely crushed. “Such a disclosure too just when you had been showing off the designs for the new buildings to the poor invalid! Were you at liberty to do that without the present owner’s knowledge?”

“I took her consent for granted.”

“Then it is a lady who owns the Farm?” She looked up surprised, but more hopeful. “You said just now that Otto Franz might remain at the Hirschwinkel too. I suppose then the new owner would not object to let the land on lease?”

He gazed into her troubled face and smiled.

“That, I don’t know, you must ask Fräulein Agnes Franz.”

She stood as if turned to stone and allowed him unresistingly, like one in a dream, to take possession of her hands and hold them fast in his for a moment. He related to her his accidental discovery of his aunt’s last wishes, and ended by producing the late Frau Ober-

forstmeisterin's note-book out of his breast pocket in proof of it.

Tears filled her eyes when she saw the familiar handwriting, but she did not touch the proffered book, she rather pushed it gently from her.

"That is no real will, Sir," she said decidedly, struggling hard to subdue her emotion. "Nobody on the face of the earth would admit that the person named there possessed the shadow of a claim."

"Nobody?" he repeated. "Why, what has the unfortunate world done to you that you should suppose it so full of knaves? It may be there are some who pay little or no attention to the last wishes of their relatives unless they are endorsed by any amount of pen and ink from the hand of a stranger—let them stick to their so-called legal rights if they like—but in my opinion, an appeal to the law in matters of this kind is a species of infidelity. Oh, you needn't shake your head at me as if I and my ideas came from some far-off, legendary land. Granted that they are somewhat slow, like my whole mental confirmation—you know yourself what a nincompoop

I am at understanding men and things; how, for weeks I regarded a marvel as an every day matter—but, I can tell you for all that, my ideas have the highest, the only infallible judge on their side—conscience.”

At this allusion to his rôle of dupe, which she could not well interrupt him in, she had coloured crimson, and hurried on again, but he had kept by her side. They had now left the plantation behind them, and the Farm garden came in sight.

“This discovery in my late aunt’s work-bag, was not very agreeable to me at first, I must admit, because it necessitated some personal intercourse with the Amtmann’s dreaded niece,” he continued, after a second’s pause, during which the bright smile which so beautified his face, rippled over it. “But I lulled my conscience wickedly to sleep, by the thought, that my solicitor could easily arrange the matter after I had left the Hirschwinkel. All at once the Amtmann’s *son* appeared on the scene of action, thereby rendering matters more complicated. I felt that I must inspect things personally at the Farm, if I wished to do my duty. I must discover why the Testa-

trix had appointed a girl to be the guardian, and care-taker of the old people, though they had a son of their own."

"I understand the dear old lady's idea on the subject quite well," said the girl, greatly affected. "Otto was always kind, and yielding to a weakness. Like his poor mother, he was wholly unable to withstand his imperious father; but now that he has learned such bitter lessons, now that he knows the pain of hunger, and that nothing but the strictest frugality and determined opposition to that mania for squandering, can secure the evening of his parents' days from want, now ——"

"You think I ought to alter this last disposition in favour?"

She was silent for a moment, then lifted her beautiful tear-stained eyes, in speechless gratitude to his, and said decidedly:—"Well, yes, if I am not doing wrong, in thus confirming you in such unparalleled generosity."

He laughed, and pushed open the garden door, which they had just reached. "Then, I may not invite you to enter your own property, as I had intended. You resign your right."

“With all my heart,” she exclaimed, stepping in and turning towards him. “I want nothing—and this I know,” and she folded her hands fervently on her bosom—“go where I may, my home will still be here, if ever I yearn for its sweetness.”

“I should think you had earned a right to that, pretty severely. But don’t you know, no true husband ever allows his wife to have any other home than his?”

She moved away with an angry and embittered expression on her colourless face. “I have nothing to do with circumstances of that kind,” she replied moodily. “No husband will ever dictate to me, what I may, or may not do. Do you suppose I could ever taste a crumb of bread at the table of one, whose constant thought would be, that not love, but the longing after a desirable position in life, had placed me at his side. No, in comparison with that, the governess’s bread is sweet and honourable, and I will eat it so long as life and strength are left me.”

“Agnes!”—he had seized both her hands and despite all her efforts held them fast and drew her towards him. “Do you really mean to

punish a poor, presumptuous fellow so unmercifully; one, who, acting on a rashly adopted prejudice, knew not himself what he was doing."

A playful smile crossed his lips.

"Would you have me go down on my knees in this soaking garden, and implore your forgiveness? Shall I fling the trumpery bit of money, for which you're giving up a wicked, conceited fellow, into the Spree? I'll do anything you like. I'll sound the praises of the calumniated race without intermission all my life, and break a lance in their honour whenever I can! I'll subscribe to the home for superannuated Governesses—I'll do anything to expiate my guilt—Agnes!"—and his voice resumed its tone of gravity and intense pleading: "You know not it is *you* who give, not *I*. You spoke just now of a desirable position in life. Who says I can give you one? No aristocratic blood runs in my veins, no title, either of public or privy councillor do I bear to my name. My good, honest father roamed the world as a workman, with his knapsack on his back—I am a workman's son, accustomed to serve from my boyhood; that is, to work at

the hammer and anvil just as my own subordinates do now; and, even still, whenever there is any new machinery to be tested, it might happen that I should enter my wife's room with a smutty face. You see how much better I am than you are—nobody would persuade me that you, refined lady that you are, would shrink away from me on that account, but far more probably respect the traces of honest labour. Am I right, Agnes?"

Her head had sunk upon her breast—not a sound, in reply, escaped her lips, but clear drops trembled on her lashes.

"Properly speaking, I ought not to waste another word, but simply take what is already mine," he went on. "Does the fowler ask his little prisoner's leave to hold him in his grasp? And you were *mine* from the moment that you voluntarily entered my domain. I tell you to your dear face, it was no Samaritan pity, none of the conscientiousness anxious to fulfil your plighted word, that broke down maiden pride and conquered your wounded sense of honour—but the same irresistible spell that haunted me and absolutely chained me to your footsteps—one we are, to all eter-



nity. Now, Agnes ; wicked, implacable one, will you fight any further against fate ?”

“ How can I, if you take one weapon after another out of my hand ?” she murmured, hiding her face in his bosom. They were standing not far from the lime-tree bower, and the stillness around was so intense, that the occasional drops of rain still trickling down, could be distinctly heard as they fell on the stone slab ; not a word was said to break this silence by these two, as they stood fast locked in each other’s arms.

Later on, they proceeded hand in hand along the pathway which led through the raspberry bushes into the yard. They passed the herb garden, where on the occasion of Herr Markus’s first visit to the farm, the girl had so hurriedly—or as he maintained, so “jealously”—pulled down her sleeves to hide her bare arms.

“ Was it not a touch of the Franz pride that made you so unwilling to meet strangers in your working dress ?” he inquired, “ and induced you to assume the disguise of maid ?”

“ Not at all. At first the mistake amused me, so I did nothing to correct it ; afterwards

indeed I clung to it in self-defence. I never, never intended you to know the despised governess. Moreover, I had *orders* not to raise my vizer. My uncle was beside himself at the bare idea that the new landlord should discover the Amtmann's niece in a girl working in the fields ; he made me promise to be on my guard till—Herr Markus was gone. The old man is weak ——”

“Abominably ungrateful you mean,” he interposed angrily. “And I don't mean to forget it to him,” he muttered to himself as he crossed the yard, while Agnes, leaving him, slipped round under the windows and ran up to the attic to change her dress.

The Amtmann was in the sitting room just about opening the window to empty out his pipe. He never noticed the girl flitting by, but he saw Herr Markus coming towards him.

“So there you are, Sir, safe and sound,” he called out. “Come in, pray, my wife has been very anxious about you. There, Saunchen, I hope you're satisfied now ; here's our young neighbour, as you can see for yourself, looking as fresh as a daisy ; just as if he had come out

of a band-box," he said laughing, as Herr Markus entered.

"I thought as much—reached a place of safety all right and may be congratulated. But what a storm it was to be sure! And our girl never came home till afterwards; how were we to know she had been taking shelter all that time at The Forestry? And, even when she did come back, it was without a hat, dripping, and trembling all over like an aspen leaf. That's not like her, you must know. She's got soldier's blood in her veins, and doesn't want for courage, but a forest-storm like that is certainly no joke."

"I know that, by experience—I was in the forest too," said Herr Markus, who had gone over to the old lady's couch to speak to her.

"Really! what on earth possessed you to run that way, into the very teeth of the storm?"

"I think I explained to you when I was here before, that I was following up a track," said Herr Markus, very quietly, "so that I could scarcely have gone on tarrying in a place of safety till the rain had washed away every footprint—you are already aware I went in search of your late maid." The old

lady's hand, which still lay in his, twitched convulsively.

"Don't be uneasy," he said, looking into her terrified face, with radiant eyes. "It's all right, it was no child's play, I can tell you, but the battle's won—I have found the girl."

"Found her?" repeated the Amtmann stammering and stuttering, and letting the hand holding his pipe fall, as if paralysed.

"Sir, are you making game of us?"

"Dearest, what an expression!" exclaimed the poor invalid in a shaking voice.

"Never mind," continued Herr Markus with his pleasant smile. "'The comedy of error,' in which I have played the chief part is at an end, and I should be the last to desire its continuance. As I said, I have found the girl. You know and love her, but are probably not aware *how* striking the beauty and elegance of her appearance, else had you never supposed that the maiden in the working dress could escape observation—I have watched this rare creature, and as I prefer energy and ability in woman far before the airs and graces of mere fine ladies, as I am even a friend to honest toil,

there was nothing to prevent my losing my heart."

He turned away from the invalid to the Amtmann. "All at once I learned that she had been dismissed, and you expressly confirmed the fact, so now you will scarcely be surprised that I ran into 'the teeth of the storm,' seeing the happiness of my life was at stake. As I have said, I found it, not indeed just as I expected—the scene changed as in a fairy tale, where, at the decisive moment the hero or heroine always undergo a transformation—but I found that The Farm is where I must finally address myself, therefore I am come, as in duty bound, to ask you for the hand of my Agnes."

"Dear, dear, what a sly-boots ; playing out a regular romance behind the old man's back without his having a suspicion of it!" exclaimed the Amtmann struggling to master his overpowering embarrassment. "But you shall have her, Herr Markus, you shall have her. You agree too, Sauchen, don't you?"

"Agree, dearest!" Murmured the old lady, deeply moved. "I would I could thank the

good God on my knees for the happiness he has bestowed on our self-sacrificing child."

The Amtmann hemmed and hawed and opening the door called out in a loud voice for his niece, in a few minutes she came flying downstairs, looking sweetly bridal in a light summer dress. She knelt beside the invalid's couch and bent her beautiful head to receive the caress of the poor faded hand laid upon it.

"What a change, my child," whispered the old lady, weeping for joy. "Isn't it like the noble Boaz courting Ruth?"

"What nonsense you are talking, wife," burst out the Amtmann angrily. "Excuse me, but the comparison between our niece here and the poor gleaner in the Bible is quite out of place. Bah, Herr Markus, don't be afraid—things are not so bad as all that. Wait till my Californian comes back."

Agnes looked up at Herr Markus, as if appealing for help, and the old lady sank back dejectedly on her pillow as the Amtmann left the room to fetch, as he said, a bottle of wine from his cellar in honour of the event.

"Oh, how sad!" groaned the poor invalid. "My poor boy must return laden with gold if

his father's to welcome him, while I would willingly give the remnant of my miserable existence only just to see him, let him return how he might. But he no longer lives."

"He lives. You will see him again, and that perhaps soon, I give you my word on it," said Herr Markus, bending kindly over her. "All will yet be well, just leave anything that troubles you entirely to me."

"God bless you, God bless you a thousand times," stammered the astonished woman, folding her hands, and raising them fervently to heaven.

## CHAPTER XIX.

“WELL, that’s all right,” would have been Frau Griebel’s observation had she been present ; but query would she have been satisfied had this story ended with the Frau Amtmann’s blessing ? Hardly. In the first place, her maternal pride would have been wounded had her Louisa disappeared thus from the scene without any kind of *éclat* ; then, it would have violated her sense of duty and her conscience, if the world at large had not been advertised as to where and when the late Frau Oberforstmeisterin’s confirmation gift, Louisa’s medallion, had been discovered again, and finally the little woman’s hands were full before she could get everything into proper order. Yes, she would suffer no concealment, everything must be told openly—that was only fair.

She was standing in the hall with her little daughter, the day after the thunder storm, busy cutting up the promised cake, with the



extra raisins in it, while the urchins outside were collecting in crowds on the door steps, and under the pear tree, staring longingly, but still respectfully in at the open door; they neither could nor would have dared to venture in—the Frau Verwalterin, and her Fräulein daughter's white aprons were actually dazzling with cleanliness, and the well-scrubbed floors no less so, while yonder stood Hannah near the table, with a large cake-plate in her hand, casting murderous glances at any little naked foot that appeared inclined to invade the door-sill.


Mistress, maiden, and maid, all looked up at once, as two tall figures suddenly darkened the entrance. Frau Griebel let her knife fall, and her small blue eyes twinkled with surprise. Sure enough, however, it was Herr Markus, the object of her motherly care, "her spoilt child," as he was wont to call himself. But how different he looked; so erect, so proud, so radiant. By his side floated a white dress, and the slim figure leaning on his arm, as if "quite at home there," wore a pretty hat, and grey veil covering her dark locks; the worthy little body had seen that hat before; it was none

other than that at the Tillröder church in Amtmann's pew ; so then, the lady in the white dress must be the Amtmann's niece, the governess, and he must have been stone-blind, indeed, to whom it was not apparent that the wedding cake was needed.

And the whole thing had come upon them like a thunder-bolt ! It had all been settled behind their backs, and they couldn't help feeling rather ashamed of their own stupidity. Frau Griebel, however, wasn't going to give in, or allow them to see her utter confusion. She'd be equal to that dissembler. Smoothing out her white apron with both hands, she took a few steps forward, and made a solemn curtsy in token of welcome, while, pointing to the cake, she said, with a meaning air ; "that's not it yet, Herr Markus".

He laughed. "No, we must celebrate our engagement first, as is customary and proper, don't you think so, Agnes ?" He then introduced his betrothed, and the unfortunate Hannah had more than enough to do to keep off the swarms of dirty urchins that kept pressing forward to get a peep at the pretty lady.

But she had no pride about her. She took off her gloves at once to assist Louisa in dividing the cake amongst the children, while Herr Markus fetched a large bunch of keys and returned soon after with an armful of bottles out of the cellar. Each of the children got a glass of Rhine wine, and Herr Markus emptied his purse of all its small silver into his betrothed's lap, that she might distribute them amongst the delighted crowd. While they were standing on the steps, surrounded by the assembly of children, whom half laughing, half reproving they succeeded in keeping in order, Frau Griebel sipped away thoughtfully at her golden beverage, her small, bright eyes fixed on the girl. Those dexterous fingers yonder, were marvellously sunburnt and dark, contrasted with the white, muslin sleeves. Round the throat, just below the lace frill, she could catch a glimpse of some glittering gold ornament, and the beautiful face—well, on a former occasion she had declared it wouldn't be easy to find its like, far or near. But she wasn't going to make any remarks at present, no not one. She only drank with Herr Markus to the "treasure he



had found," as he himself had said the day before, and declared, that as far as she could judge, he was in luck's way and had drawn a prize.

Later in the day, when she showed the affianced pair over the upper story, because Agnes wished to see the bow-room, she pointed out the Frau Oberforstmeisterin's portrait, and said in a significant tone, "Fräulein, that was his first love at the Hirschwinkel—our young master quite lost his heart to that frizzy head there ; it was the flaxen locks did it ——"

"Hardly the flaxen locks, most respected Griebel," laughed Herr Markus. "No, the charm of that face first took full possession of me after I had had a glimpse into the inner life of that remarkable woman," he said very gravely, turning to his betrothed. "So fragile and so lovely, to all appearance a weak woman, yet, endowed with such energy and strength of will. Here it was, that I first met with such a marvellous combination, and here that I first learned to understand and value you, Agnes."

The young girl, whom he drew towards him tenderly as he said this, had never been at the Hirschwinkel during the old lady's lifetime,

who would not have liked such an intrusion on her privacy, but she had often been on a visit at Gelsungen herself, and there had ample opportunity of making acquaintance with and learning the value of Amtmann's niece and adopted daughter. The old lady had botanized there too, and in her rambles Agnes had always been her companion.

She looked round her now with a tender glance at the homely rooms whose walls had been witnesses of a woman's sorrow, from its first wild outburst to its latest stage of calm and silent resignation. Up to this she had only looked reverently at the bow-window in passing by—now, she might enter in and the familiar nook was about to become her maiden bower till the beloved one came to fetch her home.

“Aye,” said Frau Griebel, “in the old lady's time, that bow-window there used to remind me of a jewel-case, all filled with mignonette and Alpine violets, (cyclamen) and at Christmas time the windows were always full of lily of the valley and tulips, just like the grandest hot-house. Aye, there was something quite unlike anybody else about

our old lady. 'Poetry itself,' is what my Louisa always says to things of that kind, but then our lady was so resolute and practical at the same time—the useful and the necessary always held first place with her—but what I wanted specially to remark, Sir, to you, is this, that your visitors won't have much room to move about here."

"My worthy Griebel, don't frighten me that way, I was just about to announce the advent of another visitor—the Amtmann's son has arrived."

"What! The one from the gold-diggings?"

"The very same. He has been ill and must recruit here. Of course, I shall remain at The Hirschwinkel myself as long as I can—you must try and manage the best way you can."

"Don't you be afraid, Herr Markus—I'll put you up downstairs in my own sitting-room and as for this part—you just leave that to *me*."

In a few days the blue blinds at the Forestry disappeared, and the Tillröder urchins, drawn thither by an unusually rich harvest of berries, would watch the lovers paying a daily visit to

the Ranger. The invalid mended visibly. At first, indeed, he had been sorely cast down, he had hoped never again to meet the man who had been witness of his miserable plight; his last lucid moments, previous to his illness, had been spent in making Agnes and the Ranger promise never to divulge his existence by a single word—he wanted to be as one dead as far as the Manor people were concerned—and now here was the noble-minded, manly owner himself, coming day after day to nurse and attend him. The affectionate brotherly tone he assumed towards him was not long, however, in overcoming the sense of bitter humiliation from which he suffered. But what revived him most of all was the intelligence that the Farm was to become his own property. From that day forward, his prostrate form began to resume its natural strength and vigour.

That was one part of the load Herr Markus had relieved his dear betrothed of, the other one, at The Farm, gave him far more trouble—the Amtmann was not to be disabused of belief in the Californian riches; any expression of incredulity was received by him with a contem-

tuous laugh, and he made no concealment in his cutting replies of his belief that nothing but envy and jealousy gave rise to such doubts. Not until the first day that young Franz had been able to take his first walk, leaning on Herr Markus's arm, and that he had told his father that the Ranger had received a letter from his old play-fellow, did the old gentleman subside into an apathetic silence—he saw there was no more capital to be made out of his “rich boy's” long years of absence. The supposed return of their son drew nearer every day, and it became more and more apparent that he was bringing nothing with him but a heart full of true filial affection, and a firm resolve to work and care for his people manfully. The tidings of their old friend's legacy fell here too, like a soothing balm.

Meantime a great and important change was going on elsewhere. There had not been such doings going on at the Hirschwinkel, time immemorial. The Farm was over-run with workmen, who had cut down a considerable part of the plantation and pulled down the offices, while every day fresh stones for the




new building were being carted in. At the Manor, brooms and scrubbing brushes were not less busily at work; beds were aired, carpets and furniture beaten, and Frau Griebel kept thanking her stars that owing to some alterations at Louisa's school, her holidays had been extended, and she could have her help. In the midst of all this fuss, packages from Berlin made their appearance; a bath-chair for the old lady, and two comfortable arm-chairs for both the old peoples' sitting-room. Then, not long after, and Herr Markus himself could not help laughing as he helped to unpack it, a piano arrived for the bow-room. It was to remain stationary there, so that the young wife might never miss her music on her future visits to Thuringia.

“Aye, aye, Herr Markus, you see that's the way of the world,” said Frau Griebel, her eyebrows arched and looking very wise. “When you first came, you gave me very plainly to understand that you couldn't endure piano-forte playing; of course, that prevented my little Louisa ever touching the keys when you were at home—though many's the time I'd have given my eyes to hear my favourite

piece—and now, if you please, you've been and fetched one of those 'cursed rattle-traps' from Berlin, helped to carry it upstairs yourself, and been panting, and blowing, and puzzling your brains for the last half hour as to which would be the best place for it to stand, so that not a note of the precious performance may be lost—and all this, because you're fond of the hands that are to play upon it. Well, well, I knew it all along—the dead must make room for the living; they have it all their own way on the earth, and the dead must just content themselves. Why, goodness me, if everyone was of your opinion, that is, if all the dead people's rooms were to be kept under lock and key to all eternity—the world would soon be turned into a big rag-shop, and human beings would have to make room for rubbish—I'm no monster, and have every respect for them that are gone, and on that account I've peppered the Herr Oberforstmeister's dressing-gown well—the moths were just mountains high in it—and packed it up with all the other faded trumpery, in a trunk. I've put it away in a corner and there it may remain till doomsday—I'll never disturb it again, anyhow, and

the pretty down cot, where years and years ago, the Frau Oberforstmeisterin's little one slept its few short weeks of life, it has been thoroughly aired and beaten, and put in one of the bedrooms, where it may be useful yet. So there now, just come up and see how nice and roomy it is—the Amtmann's son might arrive now from the diggings." With these words she threw open the suite of apartments to the left, and certainly she was right, no pleasanter habitation could have been found. Nevertheless, the change vexed Herr Markus, he had sanctioned it unawares.

"It was high time some sensible person found their way into this tomb," pursued Frau Griebel, totally ignoring her young master's vexation. "If our old mistress could only have seen *that* cloud of moths about her ears, *wouldn't* she have been pleased to see a thorough good sweeping. And may I ask what you'd have done by-and-bye when you were coming here with a family to spend a summer at the Hirschwinkel? Were the merry little Brandenburgers to sit moping in the corner on account of the poor little six-weeks-old, so long turned to dust?"



This latter argument on the part of the energetic, practical little body seemed to produce a decided effect, and Herr Markus vacated the field in silence.

This scene took place the morning of the day on which the Amtmann's family were to effect their removal to the Hirschwinkel from the farm. Everything was in order ; the bow-window was filled with the choicest flowers, and wreaths and garlands were hung over every door ; downstairs, however, the moving and scrubbing and dusting had only really begun—the sitting-room, Herr Markus's temporary abode, had been the last on the list.

They must have been completely absorbed in their cleaning, for as the new-comers crossed the yard, Sultan barked a welcome like mad, and the turkeys came strutting out, but not another living creature appeared on the scene. Not until Herr Markus and his betrothed had reached the hall door was the room door thrown open, and Frau Griebel, followed by Louisa, came waddling out.

“ A nice reception,” exclaimed the portly little dame. “ I've all but missed bidding you welcome, though I had a beautiful speech pre-

pared all ready for the occasion. But here's the cause"—and she flung the lost medallion, with its long velvet ribbon, into the air—"Yes, there it is, the rascally thing, stuck behind the drawers, if you please. When we moved them out to make room for your writing-table, Herr Markus, we heard the stray treasure fall on the floor, and Hannah declares that that bad girl Rosy did it, just to make us think the poor lad we picked up on the roadside was a thief. Who could believe such a thing? The unfortunate fellow had done nothing on earth to injure her."

"He was no thief—I always knew that," said little Louisa. "He was good and true. Such honest blue eyes ——" she stopped quite suddenly and grew crimson. In the hall door, not three steps distant from her, stood a tall, slight, narrow-shouldered young man; he was elegantly dressed, looked refined and gentlemanly, and on his thin, beardless face, seemed to glow a reflection of the crimson that covered the young girl's fair cheeks.

He had helped the Amtmann up the steps: the old man had paused a moment to recover his breath before entering, then, pinching

Louisa's cheek, he introduced the somewhat shy and confused looking young man at his side to the Frau Mama, as his dear son, who had been making a long and delightful tour abroad, as beseemed a young man in his station, and had only returned the day before from Bremen.

In a few moments more the wheels of the bath-chair were heard on the gravel, and the Ranger, who had got permission to drive the Frau Amtmann over, took her in his arms and carried her up to the bow-room, as if she had been a child; a table, festively arranged, awaited them there.

From that day forward a perfect pattern of domestic life began at the Manor. Even the Amtmann, conscious of the great change in his existence, moderated his pretensions and querulousness to some extent; when he occasionally indulged in his old boastful yarns, the others lent a deaf ear; without this outlet, his incorrigible passion would have smothered him. His son, on the other hand, came out splendidly in his new calling. He went to school again under the honest simple-minded farmer. From early morning till late at night

he was hard at work as any labourer, and Peter Griebel declared that the Farm would be "quite another story now".

In the sunshine of such happiness, the old lady, who had so long been a prisoner to her sick bed, revived once more, and the doctor promised her perfect recovery. In the evening the whole family, to whom Peter Griebel, his wife and child, were now added, assembled round her chair, in the bow-room, then they had music and conversation, and many a time the brightly lighted windows of the Manor House might have been seen shining till midnight, in the solemn stillness of the woods.

Herr Markus kept putting off his departure week after week, and little Louisa made no secret of her intense desire that the alteration in the schoolroom might never be finished. She played no more marches. Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte" and music of that kind had taken their place, but better still did she like the singing in her sweet modest voice, "Ich schnitt es gern in allen Rinden ein," and any other composition the great musician has given us in his melting tones of love and longing.

Nobody referred by so much as a word to the many mysteries that had preceded this blissful life of harmony. The Ranger too, though he had daily intercourse there—Herr Markus to his intense delight had appointed him care-taker over the book-room—was on his guard, and no reference to the days when he nursed his sick friend, ever escaped him. Herr Markus could not help laughing in secret at the stout little dame who had always kept declaring “she was’nt born yesterday”—this time the keen blue eyes had been taken in and no wonder with her sixteen-year-old little one.

The evening before Herr Markus’s departure—now definitely fixed—had arrived. His presence at home was absolutely necessary to enable him to arrange matters previous to his marriage. They were all assembled up in the bow-room. The Amtmann, his wife, and Peter Griebel were playing whist with dummy; the fair fiancée had taken the post of tea-maker for a few minutes, and Frau Griebel was cutting bread and butter at a side table, while Louisa was sitting at the piano, pouring forth with intense feeling, “Meine Ruh’ ist hin, mein Herz ist schwer”. Young Franz was



leaning sideways against the wall so as to command a full view of the girl's youthful face. He was gazing at her intently—devouring her with his eyes.

Herr Markus touched the busy little woman lightly on the shoulder, and smiled meaningly at the young couple.

“What would you think, respected foster-mother, if, on the fifteenth of September, two pairs of lovers were united in the Tillröder church instead of one?”

“A little too soon, Herr Markus,” she answered, without betraying the least surprise, and laying two slices of thin bread and butter together with conscientious precision. “My lass is still too young for that, and a proper outfit can't be got ready head over heels in that way. What are you thinking of? There's something more needed besides that. Otherwise, I have nothing against it; he's good and honest, and we couldn't wish for a better son-in-law. As for my Louisa, she's fair and fresh and clever-handed; and the chests and cup-boards at the Griebel's are not empty. My Peter and his old woman never were sluggards; they knew as well as anyone

how to lay by a penny. Aye, aye, as I say, it would please us well enough, but—" and she beckoned Herr Markus nearer, as she stood on tip-toe and whispered in his ear—" who'd have thought it, the day I gave the red-beard that roll on the roadside?" Herr Markus could hardly refrain from laughing out loud. "So you've found it out?"

"I should think so—I and my Louisa—she first of all. She saw it at the first glance, though Amtmann's son had cut off his red beard ten times over. Who could have thought it! Louisa, the innocent little fledgeling, hardly out of the shell. But Love sharpens the wits; not but he's blind enough betimes to everything going on around him—I mean Love—and sees nothing till its shoved under his very nose—or was it perhaps otherwise with you, Herr Markus, and Amtmann's maid?"









